ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

July 1983
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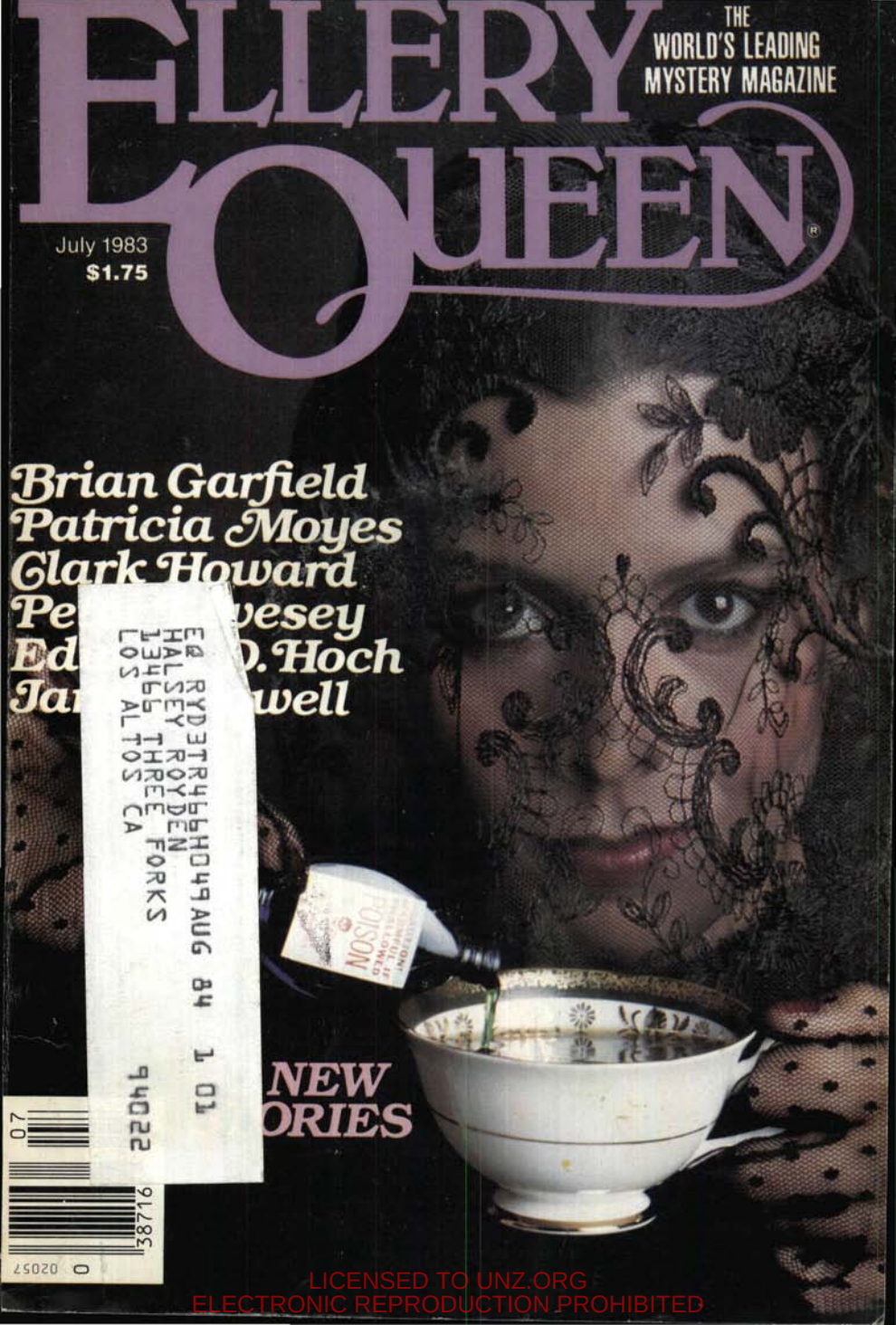

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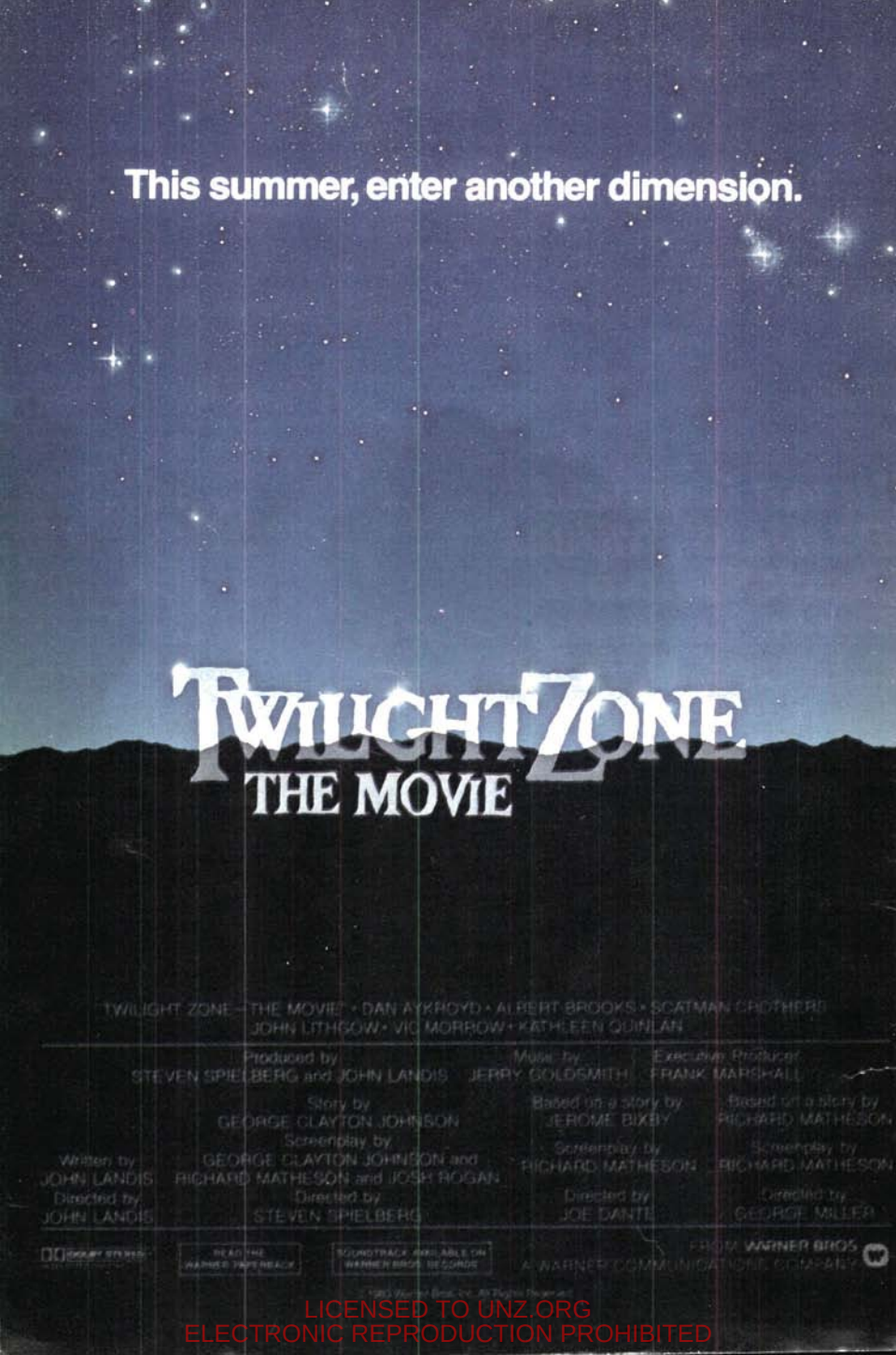

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN ®

6 **The Theft of the Unsold Manuscript** / Edward D. Hoch
20 **The House of Fragrant Delights** / LaVonne Sims
30 **The View** / Brian Garfield
43 **Nothing To Joke About** / Browning Norton
51 **The Bird-of-Paradise Man** / James Powell
66 **Frame Fourteen** / Gerald Tomlinson
76 **Eddie's Luck** / Charles R. McConnell
82 **The Faithful Cat** / Patricia Moyes
106 **Always in Season** / Jeffry Scott
111 **The Virgoan and the Taurean** / Peter Lovesey
122 **Six Tablespoons Molasses** / Ron Goulart
137 **Run from the Hunter** / Clark Howard

97 **Mystery Newsletter** / R. E. Porter and Chris Steinbrunner
102 **The Jury Box** / Jon L. Breen

Note: indicia on page 162

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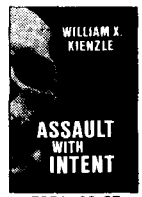

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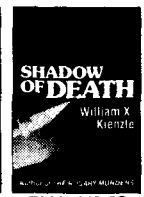

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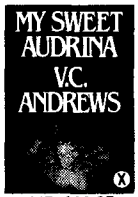

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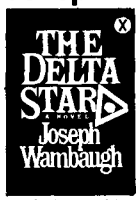

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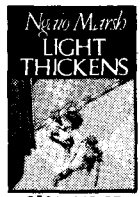

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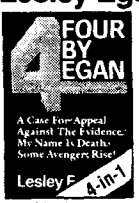

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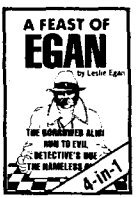

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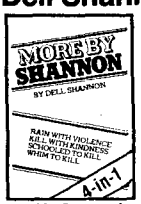

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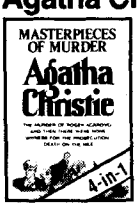

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

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"I want you to steal the manuscript of a short story," Roger Raffer told Nick Velvet. "It was written over thirty years ago and never sold."

"By a well known writer?" Nick asked. "If it has any value—"

"No, it doesn't. The author isn't a writer at all—he's a banker down in Maryland. This was something he wrote in college... He tried to sell it to several magazines, but no one would buy it..."

THE THEFT OF THE UNSOLD MANUSCRIPT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Raffer hadn't seen Jed Greenbow in more than thirty years, not since they'd been college classmates in the days following World War II. But they recognized each other at once because neither one had changed that much. Jed's hair was graying a bit and he'd put on some weight, but there was still a hint of boyish charm in his face.

"Raffer! Roger Raffer! I'd know you anywhere! How the hell've you been?" Jed shifted his cocktail to shake hands.

"I've been well, Jed. Following your career in the papers."

The party, celebrating the new offices of a local television station, swirled around them. It was the sort of gathering where one expected to see the city's civic and business leaders, and Raffer should not have been surprised that Greenbow, president of Midstate Savings and a leader in community renewal, was among them. After thirty-odd years, though, it was something of a shock.

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"Don't believe what you read about me in the papers," Jed Greenbow said. "Sometimes I think they drag out my picture on slow news days to fill up space. How've the years been treating you, buddy? Are you married?"

"I—"

"Oh, here's my wife! Cynthia, I want you to meet Roger Raffer, an old college classmate of mine."

Cynthia Greenbow's face was familiar to Roger from the society pages of the local paper, too. Tall, blonde, and very attractive, she was twenty years younger than her husband. "A pleasure to meet you," she said, extending a slim, perfect hand to Raffer. "I'd like to hear about Jed's college days sometime."

Raffer smiled. "The thing I always remember is that in English Composition Jed's short story got a higher grade than mine. It was the only one the professor read in class."

Jed smiled at the memory. "My one claim to literary fame."

"Did you ever publish that story anywhere?" Roger asked him.

Greenbow shook his head. "I must have tried every magazine in the country with it. They all said no. I guess that's when I decided to become a banker instead of a writer."

"Do you still have the story?" his wife asked.

"I think it's up in Mother's old trunk in the attic. Maybe my grandchildren will find it someday."

She was curious now. "What was it about?"

"A very boring story of occupied Germany after the war. I was just out of the Army, going to college on the G.I. Bill, and trying to write about my own experiences."

"I'll have to read it sometime. I never knew I was married to a would-be author."

"Get him to tell you about the time he ran for class president and—"

"Cynthia knows all my secrets," Greenbow interrupted. "But what about you? Do you still live in town?"

"I'm the other side of Washington, actually, but I get up here on business fairly often. I see the papers."

"Nice layout they've got here for the station," Greenbow observed, shifting the conversation to small talk.

Cynthia touched a hand lightly to her husband's arm and said, "It's been nice chatting with you, Mr. Raffer. I hope we see more of you." She moved off into the crowd without waiting for his response.

"Your wife is charming," Raffer said. "You're a lucky man."

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Jed Greenbow smiled. "I like to think it's more than luck. Nice running into you, Roger."

Ten minutes later Raffer left the party, knowing what he must do.

Raffer had heard rumors of the man named Nick Velvet who stole only valueless objects for a flat fee of twenty-five-thousand dollars. Such rumors circulated in his business. Contacting Velvet was not all that difficult, and he arranged to meet him in the lounge of a Manhattan movie theater.

His first view of Nick Velvet was somewhat startling. The man was in his forties, perhaps approaching fifty, and though he was well built he looked more like a successful auto dealer or insurance salesman than a high-paid professional thief. "You're Mr. Raffer?" he asked, sitting down next to him before Raffer had a chance to reply.

Raffer nodded. "And you'd be Velvet. I've heard you're good."

"In certain things. You know my fee. What's the job?"

Raffer cleared his throat. Across the lounge the candy attendant was making fresh popcorn and the odor of it filled the air. "I want you to steal the manuscript of a short story. It was written over thirty years ago and never sold."

"By a well known writer?" Nick Velvet asked. "If it has any value—"

"No, it doesn't. The author isn't a writer at all—he's a banker down in Maryland. This was something he wrote in college. If I remember correctly, the title was 'All Our Yesterdays.' He tried to sell it to several magazines, but no one would buy it. Even back around 1950 there was a shrinking market for serious short fiction."

"What's the story about?"

"I heard it read once in college. It's based on the author's own experiences with the Army of occupation in Germany—about how they ousted and arrested so many former Nazi officials that Communists were able to move into control in many areas. The story was written well, but without any great popular appeal."

"It sounds valueless enough for me to steal," Nick Velvet agreed. "Where is it?"

"In an old trunk in the attic of this man's house. His name is Jed Greenbow and here's his address."

"Do families still have old trunks in their attics?" Nick reflected.

"This one does. I think it belonged to Greenbow's mother."

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"How soon do you need it?"

"Over the weekend, if possible. And one other thing, Velvet—I don't want it to look like a theft. If he never realizes the manuscript is missing, so much the better."

"I assumed you wanted special handling or you could have hired a burglar for a lot less money."

"When will you deliver it?"

"Give me a phone number where you can be reached. I'll call you when I have it."

For Nick it was a fairly routine assignment. Maryland was only a bit over four hours away by car, and he told Gloria he'd drive down and do the job over the weekend. He preferred the car to flying when the job was close enough. Plane tickets and car rentals left too many records behind, even when an assumed name was used.

The city was in central Maryland, north of Washington, and Nick checked into a motel near the suburb where Jed Greenbow lived. Next he drove by the house, a white colonial that seemed fittingly imposing for the president of a bank. It was late afternoon and two teenage boys were playing in the yard.

He swung around the block, trying to think of a likely plan for entering the house. A break-in by night was too dangerous. Almost certainly a banker's home would have an alarm system—or a large dog at the very least. Then, about two blocks away, he saw a white panel truck with the name of a cable television company painted on the side. He became aware of a crew of men laying pipes along a narrow ditch by the road while some other men worked on telephone poles across the street. He stopped his car and got out.

"Putting the cable in?" he asked one man who seemed to be in charge.

"That's right." He wore a peaked white cap with the company name on it.

"I live in the big white house on Maple Circle. How long before you'll be getting to us?"

"We've already wired the poles in that block. If you've signed up for it they should be wiring your house next week."

"Thanks a lot."

As Nick walked back to his car past the white truck, he saw a workman open the rear door and remove a coil of wire. He slowed his pace, waiting until the man had moved away in the opposite direction, then as he reached the rear of the truck he turned the

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handle and pulled open the door. He grabbed up a coil of wire and a white peaked cap on the floor near it, closed the door, and walked quickly back to his car. The workmen were all busy at their tasks some distance from the truck and no one had noticed him.

Nick slipped off his jacket and tie, opened the top two buttons of his shirt, and adjusted the white cap to fit his head, checking it in the rearview mirror. Then he drove back to Maple Circle. He was gambling that the Greenbows had signed up for cable TV, but he thought it was a pretty safe gamble. He parked in front of the house and got out with his coil of wire.

"Are you getting cable TV here?" he asked one of the boys out front.

"Yeah! You come to hook it up?"

"Next week, but I need to do some preliminary work. Is your mom around?"

"Sure," the older one responded, running off. "I'll get her."

Presently a tall blonde woman appeared at the screen door. She wore faded blue shorts and a shirt knotted at her waist. Though she was clearly in her late thirties, her figure was youthful. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"Mrs. Greenbow?"

"That's right. Mark says you've come about the cable TV. We weren't expecting you till next week."

Nick hefted the coil of wire. "I have to do some preliminary checking. Could I see your attic, please?"

"The attic? I thought the cable was going to come in through the basement."

"It probably will, but we're having problems with some houses in this area and they asked me to check out the attic too. It'll only take a few minutes."

"If you say so," she said. "Come this way."

He followed her into the house and up the front stairs, admiring her long tanned legs. "I'm sorry to trouble you," Nick murmured.

"I certainly hope cable is worth all the bother when we finally get it. They had to dig a strip from the street to our electric pole to bury the pipe for the cable, and now it's too hot to grow new grass." She opened a door on the second floor and led the way to the unfinished attic.

There were boxes and suitcases piled everywhere, but only one trunk was in view—the brass-fixtured sort formerly taken on ocean voyages. "This is fine," Nick said, starting to uncoil the wire. "I just

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need to check the distances. You can go back to what you were doing if you want to. I'll yell if I need anything."

"Well—" She looked at Nick uncertainly.

"I'll be down in two minutes."

"All right. I'll be in the kitchen."

He waited until she was gone and then tried the lid of the trunk. It was locked, but he had it open in twenty seconds and started flipping quickly through the contents. World War II souvenirs—a folded silk scarf with a map of West Germany on it, some books in German, a large photograph of the personnel assigned to the Army's Criminal Investigation Division in Stuttgart. College things too—class photos, a beer mug with a fraternity crest on it, a cheerleader's pleated red skirt, perhaps recalling some wild party. And then a loose-leaf binder full of class notes—and a neatly typed manuscript bearing the heading *All Our Yesterdays, a story by Jed Greenbow.*

He stuffed it under his shirt and started to rise. Then he heard the sound behind him and whirled to see Greenbow's wife standing at the top of the stairs. She was holding a large Luger pistol in her right hand.

"Don't—" Nick began.

"This is for Kundberg," she said, and shot him.

Nick felt the bullet hit his chest and went backward, rolling over the trunk and landing amidst a pile of cartons. He lay perfectly still, waiting for a second shot, wondering when the pain in his chest would start. But there was only a sob from the woman with the gun, and a clatter as it hit the floor.

He opened his eyes and tried to get up. "You're not dead!" she gasped. "I thought I'd killed you!"

Nick steadied himself and stood up, keeping an eye on the gun where it had fallen. He reached into his shirt and extracted the Luger slug from the manuscript pages he'd secreted there. "A war souvenir, like the things in the trunk," he said. "It probably hasn't been fired in over thirty years. Gunpowder loses its potency over the years, you know. That slug didn't even have enough power to penetrate thirty pages of manuscript. With luck I'll have nothing worse than a bad bruise over my ribs."

She made no move to retrieve the fallen weapon. "I suppose you'll kill me now," she said quietly.

"I hadn't planned on it. Just who do you think I am, and who is Kundberg?"

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"You came for Jed's manuscript. You can't deny that—you have it in your hand!"

"I'm not denying it. But that doesn't answer my questions."

"I don't have to answer your questions. I'm calling the police!" She turned and started down the steps.

"Just a minute! Since you just tried to kill me, I think I'm entitled to some answers. The police will ask you the same questions. Don't you want to rehearse your explanations?"

Her eyes flashed as she paused and turned back toward him. "I don't owe explanations to a thief."

Before she could say more, her older son appeared at the foot of the attic steps. "What was that noise, Mom? Danny said it sounded like a gunshot, but I said it wasn't loud enough."

She hesitated a second and then replied, "The cable TV man just hit the wall with a hammer. He scared me too."

"Oh, okay." He ran back down the stairs.

"You made a decision," Nick said.

"I guess I did. Will you come downstairs for a cup of coffee?"

Nick thought about it and nodded.

She reached down now to pick up the gun. He could have beaten her to it, but he decided to trust her. After all, the first bullet hadn't killed him. She didn't raise the Luger again, though, but simply carried it in her hand as they descended the stairs together.

In the large modern kitchen she slid the gun into a drawer, out of sight, and heated a pot of coffee for them. "Cream or sugar?"

"Black, thanks."

"Now tell me who you are," she said, sitting across from him at the table.

"I was hired to steal your husband's manuscript."

"Did Versuch send you?"

"No. I never heard that name before," he answered honestly. "Nor Kundberg either."

"It was Colonel Versuch who ordered the killing of Hans Kundberg."

"In World War II?"

"Yes."

"That was before you were born," Nick protested.

"Hans Kundberg was my father. He died a month before I was born in 1945, just before the war in Europe ended."

"But surely you're an American."

She smiled. "I am now. Jed was a young lieutenant with the Army

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of occupation in West Germany. He befriended my mother and arranged for us to come to America. I was only two at the time, and of course I have no memory of all this. In my memory I have always been an American. My mother died young, when I was only twenty, but by that time I'd heard all the stories many times over, about what Colonel Versuch had done to us, and what Jed had done for us. He came to my mother's funeral. He had never married, and we fell in love. We've been married now for seventeen years."

"But why should you fear someone like me after all these years?"

"I was right to fear it, wasn't I? You came, didn't you?"

"I came," Nick admitted with a sigh.

"At a party last week my husband met a man named Roger Raffer. They'd gone to college together, though Raffer is younger. Jed was there on the G.I. Bill after his military service. Raffer was in his English Composition class and recalled the professor reading Jed's short story to the students. That night when we got home I asked Jed if I could see the story and he got it out of the trunk. As I read it I realized why he'd never mentioned it to me before. It is only slightly fictionalized. Most of it really happened, and in many cases he didn't even bother to change the names. Colonel Versuch is a character, and a flashback tells how he killed my father and others."

"He was never tried as a war criminal?"

Cynthia Greenbow shook her head. "And my husband's short story explains why. The Allies' military government removed all Nazis and their sympathizers from positions of power on municipal councils and the like. The people who replaced them, who filled the vacuum, were Communists for the most part. We disposed of the past enemy in favor of the future enemy. But in Jed's story there are some American intelligence officers who realize what is happening, who spirit Nazi sympathizers out of the country on board Air Force planes bound for America. The idea is that these people can work for us against the Russians."

"And Colonel Versuch is one of them?" Nick asked.

"Exactly! He escaped punishment for the murder of my father and was resettled in America. Jed knew it and put it in his story."

"But that was thirty-five years ago."

"Versuch is still alive and living somewhere in this general area. We've always known it. Sometimes I think of him when I see an elderly man in a shopping mall. He'd be in his early seventies now. There's been all this recent talk in Congressional committees of bringing Nazis in the United States to justice, of sending them back

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to Germany for trial. You can see why I supposed Versuch had hired you to steal that story naming him."

"But how would Versuch hear about the story?"

Cynthia Greenbow stared at him. "From Roger Raffer, of course. Raffer is with the CIA, and since it was American intelligence that brought Versuch here in the first place they have the most at stake in keeping his whereabouts a secret. I'm sure if Versuch didn't hire you to steal that story, Raffer did."

The news that Nick's client was with the CIA shouldn't have bothered him. Nick had done government work before, with or without advance knowledge, but Raffer had an army of people at his disposal and if he'd turned to Nick that meant it was something illegal—something the CIA couldn't do itself in this country.

"Why are you telling me this?" Nick asked. "You try to shoot me one minute, then you tell me the story of your life."

"Sometimes I just have to talk about my past to someone besides Jed."

Nick finished his coffee and stood up. "I'm taking the manuscript with me."

"Go ahead." She sighed. "I'll feel safer with it out of the house."

As he walked across the front lawn, one of the boys called over to ask about the cable TV. Nick told him it would be installed next week.

Back in New York on Sunday morning, Nick phoned the number Raffer had given him and arranged a meeting. This time they met at the Central Park Zoo, near the polar-bear cage. Raffer was already waiting when Nick arrived. "That was fast work," he said. "I didn't expect to hear from you before tomorrow at the earliest."

"It went quite smoothly," Nick acknowledged, opening the clasp on a manila envelope to show the manuscript inside.

"What's that hole?"

"Mice, I suppose. It doesn't go all the way through."

Raffer closed the envelope and passed Nick a smaller one containing his fee. "Would you mind telling me how you did it without Greenbow's knowledge?"

Nick shrugged. "They were installing cable television in the neighborhood. I passed as one of the crew."

"Clever." There was an odd glitter in Raffer's eyes.

"There's always a way. You just have to find it."

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Raffer held out his hand. "It's been a pleasure doing business with you."

"Same here," Nick said. As he started to walk away the polar bear gave an unaccustomed growl.

Raffer read the manuscript in his hotel room and decided it was still a good story. Today, with renewed interest in the fate of Nazi leaders in postwar Germany, there might even be a market for it. Then he smiled at the thought. Of course there was a market for it! Hadn't he just paid Nick Velvet twenty-five thousand dollars to steal it?

He picked up the telephone and dialed a number he'd memorized long ago. Presently a familiar voice answered and Raffer said, "Konrad? How are you today?"

"I can't complain at my age." But the voice wasn't strong, and Raffer knew the heart behind it was weak. "What do you have to report?"

"Success," Raffer said simply. "Complete success."

"Very good. So I will not have to flee the country after all."

"No," Raffer answered carefully, "but there are still some loose ends to be taken care of."

"You will attend to them?"

"Yes. You have nothing further to fear."

"Very good."

Raffer hung up and took out his address book. The important names and numbers were coded, but it took him only a minute to decipher the one he wanted. Then he picked up the phone again. This part would be simple. Oddly enough, it was easier to hire a good killer than a good thief.

Nick Velvet was uneasy. Gloria spotted the symptoms almost at once and asked, "What is it, Nicky? It was an easy assignment and you got the money. What's bothering you?"

He shook his head. "It's probably nothing at all."

"Maybe if you told me about it I could help."

"The woman trusted me, Gloria. She told me her story because she trusted me. And now I think they're going to kill her."

"What?"

"This man Raffer asked me how I'd gotten into the house. Like a fool I told him about the cable-TV people, and there was a funny

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look in his eyes when I said it, as if it was a stunt that could be worked a second time."

"But it didn't even work the first time—she didn't fall for it."

"I never told Raffer that. Since I ended up with the manuscript, there didn't seem any point. He's going to send someone back into that house, though—I'm sure of it. And what other purpose could he have but to kill Mrs. Greenbow or her husband or both of them?"

"It doesn't make sense, Nicky," Gloria argued. "If he was going to kill them, the killers could have stolen the manuscript at the *same time. Why hire you?*"

"Because Raffer couldn't risk the killer bungling and failing to find the manuscript. Then it might have been found by the authorities after the murders. The manuscript was so important he had to be certain it was in his hands first. Then Greenbow and his wife could be killed because of their knowledge of the manuscript's contents."

"That's all supposition," Gloria argued. "You're reading an awful lot into the look in a man's eyes."

"But what if I'm right?" Nick asked. "I sat and talked with that woman because she trusted me. Then I told Raffer how he could get into her house and harm her, or her husband. I'm not a killer, Gloria. I can't have those deaths on my conscience."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go back there."

They would come during the day if they were disguised as cable-television workmen. Nick flew back down to Maryland and rented a car, driving to a spot in a nearby church parking lot that gave him a clear view, through binoculars, of the approaches to the Greenbow house. They would come during the day and they would come soon, while the cable work was still in progress.

Nothing happened the first day, Monday. He saw Cynthia Greenbow go shopping, while her two sons continued to enjoy the beginning of their summer vaction. He saw Jed Greenbow come home from work shortly before five o'clock, keeping reasonable banker's hours. All seemed peaceful and routine.

On the second morning Nick began to wonder what he was doing there. Gloria was probably right. He'd read too much into that look in Raffer's eyes. He scanned the area casually with his binoculars, not really expecting to see anything. It was a dark day, with the threat of rain hanging over the city. The white-capped cable-TV

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men glanced occasionally at the sky as they strung their wires. Then he saw the car.

It was driving too slowly past the Greenbow home. Halfway down the next block it turned into a driveway, backed out, and drove past the house once more, a bit faster this time. Nick focused his binoculars on the driver.

It was Roger Raffer.

He watched the car pull around the next corner and stop out of sight of the Greenbow home. Raffer stayed inside. Nick waited no longer. He left his own car, walking quickly across the churchyard and down a slight incline, keeping Raffer's car in sight. He circled it from the rear, getting close enough to see that the door on the passenger side was unlocked. Then he moved in quickly.

Raffer whirled as the car door opened, and went for his gun. Nick was just a second faster, hitting Raffer's wrist with a sharp blow. Then he had his own weapon pressed against the man's stomach.

"I just want to talk," Nick said. "I don't want anyone to get killed."

Raffer snorted. "It's a bit late for that."

"The Greenbows?"

"No, no. Is that why you're here, Velvet? A thief with a conscience?"

"Something like that. I figured you'd send somebody in there to kill them, probably using the same disguise I used."

"If you'll take the gun away from my stomach I'll show you my identification. You're making a big mistake."

"I know you're CIA," Nick told him, keeping the gun where it was.

"Then you know too much already. Who told you?"

"I had a nice chat with Cynthia Greenbow while I was robbing her house."

"Damn," Raffer said tonelessly. He was looking straight ahead through the windshield, where little drops of rain were beginning to accumulate.

"Do you deny you came here to kill her? Or her husband?"

"I went to college with her husband," Raffer answered sadly. "It wasn't them I wanted to kill."

"Who, then?"

He was silent for a moment, perhaps realizing he'd said too much already. "All right," he decided finally. "It was Konrad Versuch."

"Colonel Versuch?"

"That was a long time ago. We brought him over here after the

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war, just like in Greenbow's story. God, when I listened to that story being read in class over thirty years ago I never dreamed the things he wrote about would someday involve me."

"If you're hiding out Versuch, why would you want to kill him?"

"Times change, politics change. Congressional committees are investigating people like Versuch now, demanding they be imprisoned or sent back to Germany for trial as war criminals. When I met Jed Greenbow at a party, I suddenly remembered the story he'd written in college. That story alone could doom Konrad Versuch. So I had you steal it—but I made the mistake of telling Versuch about it. I could see he was going to cause trouble, so I hired someone to kill him. It wasn't quite as cold-blooded as it sounds. The man is in his seventies, with a bad heart. A trial or deportation would have killed him anyhow."

"What happened?"

Raffer shrugged. "Versuch killed my man instead. Last night. Now I think he's headed here."

"Why would he come here, when he killed Cynthia Greenbow's father?"

"Because the Greenbows know he's in America and he may want to shut them up."

And then they saw him—a tall old man with white hair and a military bearing that age could not hide, walking through the rain toward the Greenbow house. "There he is," Raffer said. "I have to get him. Put your gun away."

Nick hesitated and Raffer was out of the car, running across the wet grass. Then Nick was after him, unsure of what to do. Cynthia Greenbow must have seen the man approaching too. She'd come to the door of the house, and Nick recognized the old Luger pistol in her hand.

Konrad Versuch saw the two men running toward him and must have recognized Raffer even in the rain. He raised his arm, and Nick saw that he too had a gun. He fired twice and Nick skidded on the wet grass as a bullet passed overhead, seeing Raffer go down too, clutching his side.

Cynthia Greenbow, standing in the doorway, raised the Luger and fired one shot at the old man. Konrad Versuch threw back his shoulders in a sort of spasm, then, almost in slow-motion, he toppled to the grass and lay still.

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"He's dead," Nick said, bending over the fallen old man. "There's no bullet wound, but he's dead."

"His heart gave out," Raffer said from where he lay nearby. "Get me an ambulance, will you?"

Nick hurried up to the house, to where Cynthia Greenbow still stood with the pistol in her hand. "I didn't mean to kill him," she said. "I only meant to keep him from killing you both."

"It wasn't the gun. His heart just stopped. I need an ambulance for Raffer."

"I'll call one," she said. "Go while you can, before the police come."

He took a deep breath. "The dead man was—"

"I know who he was."

Nick nodded and hurried back to his car. Minutes later, as he drove away, he heard a siren far in the distance. By that time the rain had stopped, and from some of the houses children were coming out to play.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

AIN'T LARCENY GRAND?

by LOLA STRONG JANES

Nick Velvet's a thief, but he's smart.
He steals worthless things—it's an art.
A balloon or ashtray
By me is okay,
But the rascal—he's stolen my heart!

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a prize-winning story by

LaVONNE SIMS

Patrons thought Madame Chu the kindest and most good-natured of souls. They gave freely of their silver and lavished gifts upon her. None realized what terror she struck into the hearts of those beneath her roof . . .

The story about chivalry and chicanery you are about to read was judged a prize winner in the 1982 Cabrillo Suspense Writers Conference short-story contest by Dennis Lynds, who conducted the short-story workshop, and Conference founders Collin Wilcox and Timothy Welch. The author, LaVonne Sims, lives in San Jose, California, with her husband, an investigator for the San Jose Police Department. She writes a weekly book-review column for The Valley Times, *has had short fiction published abroad, and holds down a full-time job while raising a family of four "thunderous" children. In her rare moments of leisure she rides horseback and pursues her lifelong interest in China and the Middle East . . .*

THE HOUSE OF FRAGRANT DELIGHTS

by LaVONNE SIMS

Long before Ying Man plundered the land of the Golden Buddha, harmony reigned. To everything there was an order, both Yin and Yang. The high remained lofty and untouchable; the low suffered as always they had. Farmers worked the soil; landlords exacted a toll. First Wives ruled the home; flower girls held sway over the hearts of men. The Wheel moved smoothly on.

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But once in every dozen moons, the Old Man in the Sky became bored. At such intervals, to relieve the monotony, he allowed his chin whiskers to tickle the earth. Thus were destinies altered.

Kueilan sat before the mirror of her dressing case and gazed at her reflection. She smiled. The expression was well practiced, one she had been taught to wear when greeting men, customers who came to the House of Fragrant Delights.

"Never appear sad before a man," Madame Chu often told her girls. "Those who enter here come to enjoy life and escape the complaints and sour faces of their wives. You may pout prettily, for some men are enchanted thus, but in no case are you to whine or let them see your sorrow."

All this and much more Madame Chu told her flower girls, and they listened well, for her wisdom concerning the hearts of men was renowned. From all over the province men of affluence came to take pleasure in her establishment. In addition to the beautiful girls and the fine foods she served, patrons thought her the kindest and most good-natured of souls. They gave freely of their silver and lavished gifts upon her. None realized what terror she struck into the hearts of those beneath her roof.

Above all, Madame Chu was a shrewd businesswoman. She purchased her flowers while they were yet blossoms and nurtured them to ripe womanhood. Days of famine and flood provided lucrative investments, for during such times poor families found small females easy to market. Daughters were sold that sons might be fed.

So it had been with Kueilan. When she came to the House of Fragrant Delights she had seen but four springtimes. Madame Chu named her, as she did them all, calling her Kueilan, which meant Precious Orchid.

This very bloom Kueilan now placed in her hair, behind one ear, fastening it with a hairpin of washed silver. The flower glowed against the ivory hue of her skin.

Ying Ma, an old serving woman, stood just behind her, watching. "So, this is to be your lucky day," the old woman said. "You have set the trap and snared a rich man for yourself."

"My future is no sure thing just yet, Ancient Mother," Kueilan said in her soft voice. She put a hand over her abdomen and thought of the new life that lay nestled beneath the pale peach-colored silk of her robe, her small happiness. Then she remembered the father of that life and fear passed fleetingly across her features. If all did

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not go well, she would be separated from him forever. She would know shame and sorrow to her last day.

A scratching sounded from outside the door and Ying Ma went to pull the curtain aside. Her own husband, Old Ying, stepped across the threshold. His eyes met those of Kueilan and a secret look passed between them.

Ying Ma saw this and her dry wrinkled face flushed with anger. Of all the girls in this house, her old man favored only Kueilan. For this reason Ying Ma hated the girl, but pride kept her voice level, almost teasing. "Did you come for some reason, old bone," she asked, "or only to enjoy the morning bloom of this pretty flower?"

Old Ying cast his gaze down at once. "Madame Chu wishes to see Kueilan," he replied. "Make haste. The mistress is in a foul mood."

So saying, he hurried out of the room, slithering like a guilty soul.

Keuilan stood on her tiny feet and swayed a little. Since happiness had begun to grow within her, she felt often dizzy and light-headed.

Ying Ma led the way through long corridors, where they passed one room after another. Some of these housed as many as four girls, and others two or three. Only five of Madame Chu's flowers, the most beautiful and sought after, had a room to themselves. Kueilan was among these.

They passed through the vast tearoom also, with its rich scrolls and fine furniture, and on into a lovely courtyard. Here there was a pond set with jadeite tiles where bright-colored fish with gossamer tails darted beneath lily pads. Beyond the pond, in one corner of the court, stood a small open structure, the Pagoda of Whispers. Creeping up the red beams of this and all around the courtyard walls hung jasmine vines. Waterfalls of creamy flowers spilled everywhere, starlets that scented the morning air with their sweetness.

Kueilan watched the back of Ying Ma as they went along and she saw how the streaked grey hair was pulled into a sparse knot. She marveled at the stooped and withered body of the old woman. It was impossible to imagine Ying Ma as young and beautiful. Hard also to think of her glowing and swollen with happiness. Still, Kueilan knew that Ying Ma had been all of these things, for the gardener, Old Ying, spoke dreamily and often of those good days. And had not Ying Ma given Old Ying a strong son?

Kueilan felt a rush of affection for the serving woman.

Madame Chu sat in an ornately carved chair in the central room

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of her apartments. She did not look up when Ying Ma and Kueilan entered. She was too busy scolding the girl who served her.

Peony was a tiny thing, no more than ten years old. But already she was being trained to please the perverse appetites of men who paid great sums to fondle a child. On this morning she had been singled out to wait upon the mistress.

Kueilan looked at the girl with pity. Peony's little face was garish beneath a thick coat of rice powder and her rosebud lips were painted blood red. The blue sateen jacket and trousers she wore had been cut to fit her thin body closely.

Madame Chu reached out a ringed hand and cuffed the girl on the side of her head. "You are too clumsy!" she screamed. "Have I not told you to use plenty of oil so the comb does not pull the hair from my head? And already my tea grows cold!" With that she boxed the child's ears. Tears flowed from Peony's eyes, making pink streams in her face powder. She bowed, hastened to add water to the teapot, and then resumed oiling and combing Madame Chu's mass of tangled hair.

So sat the mistress of the House of Fragrant Delights, clad in nothing save her white-silk undergarments. Though it was only late morning and the weather fair and mild, she sweat profusely. Her exceedingly fat body smelled sour beneath the heavy scent she wore. The odor reached Kueilan and brought her close to fainting. She had taken nothing for nourishment that morning except herb tea and a small slice of melon and her stomach churned.

Madame Chu drew deeply on a silver waterpipe, closed her bulging eyes for a moment, and then turned her attention to Kueilan. "So," she said, "today Mister Kang comes. And today he will take you into his fine house as a concubine."

Kueilan's heart beat faster at these words. "You are sure that he will agree?" Her voice trembled slightly.

Madame Chu fixed the flower girl with bright, greedy eyes. "How can he refuse? Will I not swear that for these past months no other has been upon your couch?"

"Still, he can deny and refuse me," Kueilan pointed out. "Such is the way of some men, and indeed how can he be sure in his heart of hearts that the child is his?"

At this Madame Chu rapped on the arm of her chair with long, lacquered nails. "He will not question my word. If he does I will become very insulted and deny him the pleasure of my establishment. I know that old head. He will not dare." She continued,

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thoughtful: "He *can* refuse, however, for one reason or another." She looked at Kueilan sharply. "I hope you have tied him closely so this will not happen."

Kueilan kept her gaze downcast. "I have done my best, Mistress."

"Well, I hope so!" Madame Chu retorted. "You know what will happen if he should refuse. I will not keep a girl beneath my roof who is swollen with child and cannot earn her keep. Even if I could afford such a generosity, what would I do with the child? Of course, I can always make use of a *female* child." She laughed aloud and the sound struck terror in Kueilan's soul.

Madame Chu looked very stern and put upon. "If shame comes to you, it will be no fault of mine. You have been careless to get yourself in such a way." She sighed deeply and pulled again upon her waterpipe. "I had planned on a few more good years from you. I hate the thought of giving you to some farmer or suchlike. It would be a waste for you to go to a poor man who cares for nothing but the dowry you bring." She waved expansively and the flesh on her arm wobbled. "It would pain me to see you lose all this."

Kueilan knew this would indeed pain the mistress, though not for the reasons given. If Mister Kang refused to take Kueilan as Small Wife, he would have only to pay the sum for her dowry, plus a little extra to Madame Chu. This would mean much less profit.

Listening to this, Ying Ma's ears burned. A plot began to hatch in her jealous mind. She would find some way to get close to Mister Kang, she decided. Suddenly she knew just how to repay Kueilan for stealing the heart of her own good man. The flower girl deserved to be heartily punished.

Once they left Madame Chu, Ying Ma made an excuse to be quickly away.

Kueilan returned to her room to await her fate alone, but on the way she came upon Old Ying. Again their eyes locked. "Do not worry, little precious," he whispered. "My son's mother is angry, but all will go as planned."

Ying Ma found one excuse and then another to stay close by the entrance of the teahouse so that she might see Mister Kang when he arrived. In her heart she felt a little guilty for what she was about to do. Until recently, she had always liked Kueilan well enough. She had even felt a certain affection toward the flower girl. But all was different now. It changed on that night a moon ago when she saw Old Ying and the girl together in the courtyard.

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Oh, yes, Ying Ma had seen them, leaning close and speaking in low voices. At first she could hardly credit the sight. Old Ying had always been a most faithful husband, no easy feat for a man surrounded by beautiful flower girls. He had worked for this house since his youth and Madame Chu had purchased Ying Ma as his wife so that he might not turn his eyes toward her livelihood.

How well it had worked! He always seemed content with Ying Ma. She gave him three daughters in a row and still, in his devotion, he had not been bitter. Finally, thank the Old Man in Heaven, she had given him a fine son. What good days those had been!

But since that night a moon ago, she had kept her eyes wide open. The looks that passed between those two! Aiiieee, what sorrow she suffered now!

Mister Kang came through the door and Ying Ma rushed to meet him before another servant had the opportunity.

One could not miss such a man. He was rotund and oily and very prosperous-looking, with a fine robe of wine-colored silk and a sleeveless jacket of black velvet. On his feet he wore white-silk socks and velvet shoes. His forehead was shaven clean and the queue which hung down his back gleamed. He had narrow slits for eyes and licked his thick lips constantly.

"Madame Chu is not quite ready to receive you, Illustrious Sir," Ying Ma said, bowing low before him. "Pray, sit here in the cool foyer and take some refreshment, which I shall serve with my own worthless hands. When my mistress is ready, I will come and tell you at once."

Mister Kang was somewhat perturbed. More than anxious to conclude his business, he was flushed with impatience to have Kueilan away and all to himself. The whole morning long he had fought with his First and Second Wives, telling them that he would bring yet another into his house. And for all their screaming, he would not be convinced to do otherwise. Just to think of Kueilan made the blood run hot through his veins. But in front of Ying Ma he only grumbled a little and sat down, not wanting a servant to see his anxiety.

The old woman beat a hasty path to the apartments of Madame Chu, where she knew her mistress was waiting. "Mister Kang has come," she said, "but he wishes to take a little refreshment before talking business. Perhaps I should serve him some heated wine before I bring him to you. That way he will be more apt to part with his silver."

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Madame Chu saw the wisdom of this and agreed.

Ying Ma ran away again and went to the kitchen for hot rice-wine. Meat dumplings filled with steaming pork were heaped into a porcelain bowl and she prepared a tray of sweetmeats. These she took to Mister Kang, her old face wreathed in a smile.

While he ate, she stood close by to refill his cup and made idle chatter as if she had grown senile in her old age and did not know better. Without being obvious, she let it drop that she served Precious Orchid, but she gave Mister Kang no idea that she knew his errand. With a little hint here and a small innuendo there about the men who admired Kueilan, she watched Mister Kang's forehead slowly furrow. Finally, she added a last juicy tidbit. She implied, without saying so openly, that Kueilan might have some sickness that was not uncommon to flower girls. At this, the color drained from Mister Kang's face and his hands shook so badly that he spilled wine on his vest.

Ying Ma smiled behind her hand as she left him. A few minutes later, she returned to tell him Madame Chu was ready. It was all the man could do to come to his feet and walk without falling.

Just as Madame Chu had predicted Mister Kang did not deny anything, and just as Ying Ma had planned he made excuses. In the end, after many false stops and starts, he refused to take Kueilan as Small Wife. When Madame Chu became angry, he offered to pay much more than the usual sum as a dowry, in addition to an agreeable bonus for the mistress.

In truth, all the poor man could think about was getting himself to a herb shop where he might seek a cure.

At last, business concluded, Ying Ma led Mister Kang through the courtyard and out of the teahouse. Abundantly grateful for her information, he tossed her a silver coin as he ran out the door, his silk robe flying in the breeze behind him.

Strangely, now that revenge was accomplished, Ying Ma felt less elated than she had supposed she would.

Oh, well, she mused, life with a farmer cannot be so bad. Is not my own fine son just such a one? And does he not have a stout three-room house on his small plot of earth outside the city gates? My son is a good man, and any woman will be glad to have *him* when the time comes for him to wed.

Thus, Ying Ma continued to justify herself. Though she knew Kueilan would surely not get quite as good a man as her own son,

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still she convinced herself that marriage between a farmer and a flower girl would not make an end to the earth.

Kueilan went to the small ebony chest which sat in her room. Opening the lid, she prepared to pack the few things she would take with her from the House of Fragrant Delights. No servant helped her, and the other girls avoided her, knowing how sad she must be to have been rejected by the rich Mister Kang.

"Let Precious Orchid shed her tears of shame alone," they said to one another, each secretly hoping the same fate would never befall them.

Tenderly, Kueilan folded the clothes she had sewn in secret. There were two each of jackets and trousers, made of long-wearing blue cotton. Into her straw parcel she put a set of plain pottery rice bowls and teacups. One luxury she smiled at—two pairs of ivory chopsticks, the ends held together with fine silver chain. All these items she had purchased with the small gold-washed trinkets she had been given by men who found her desirable. These patrons had given cheap gifts, but not one had touched Kueilan's heart.

She pulled forth her favorite item last. Her smile grew until it lit her face like a New Year's lantern. She held up the tiny pair of baby slippers and ran her fingertips over the red-satin brocade and over the dragon she had patterned on them with gold thread. These her son would wear.

Quickly, she dressed in one set of the simple clothes and put aside her outfit of pale peach silk. She removed the orchid from behind her ear and wove her hair into two long braids. Coiling one over each ear, she fastened them in place with wooden pins.

Finally, she was ready. Slipping along back corridors and then through the bustling kitchen, she avoided the tearoom, which was beginning to fill with patrons. She could hear the forced, gay laughter of the flower girls and the playing of stringed instruments. The sounds followed her out into the night.

She waited in the courtyard. A new moon shone down upon her. The gentle breeze blew warm upon her cheek as she deeply inhaled the scent of jasmine.

Old Ying approached and put a hand upon her arm. "The mistress says I am to wait here with you until the pumpkin arrives who wishes a wife," the old man said. "Thank all the gods, she did not even wish to know that pumpkin's name!"

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For a moment they stood laughing together and trying hard to muffle the sound.

Kueilan was the first to regain her composure. She looked at the honest face of Old Ying. This face was an aged replica of the one she loved, and though it had seen many years it was still comely. Old man and girl looked at each other in mutual affection and understanding.

Kueilan spoke in her silvery voice. "I worry about one thing only, Old Father. Will not Ying Ma be furious when she finds out how she has been used? Will she not hate me the more?"

Old Ying scratched his chin. "Oh, no doubt she will be angry, and well you know that she feels no woman is quite good enough for our only son. But do not worry. In the end she will be so glad that her first suspicions were wrong, she will lose the anger quickly. And when she learns that it is *her* grandson you carry, she will weep for joy. In a year or two we will be too old to work in this place. Then we will come to you and our son." His eyes grew dreamy at this comforting thought. "And," he added, "we will come when you give birth and on feast days."

Kao, Old Ying's son—the farmer Madame Chu had called a pumpkin—was supposed to arrive at the kitchen door in the manner of all destitute bridegrooms. Instead, Kueilan heard a light, familiar tap on the secret gate beneath the jasmine vines. She was glad that he chose proudly to come the way he always had, on the many nights he met her in the Pagoda of Whispers.

She picked up her parcel from the tiled floor and smiled one last time at Old Ying. Looking at the fishpond gleaming in the moonlight, and at the beautiful teahouse with its golden fixtures, she knew she would miss none of it. Precious Orchid took the rough hand Kao held out to her and left the House of Fragrant Delights.

"Q"

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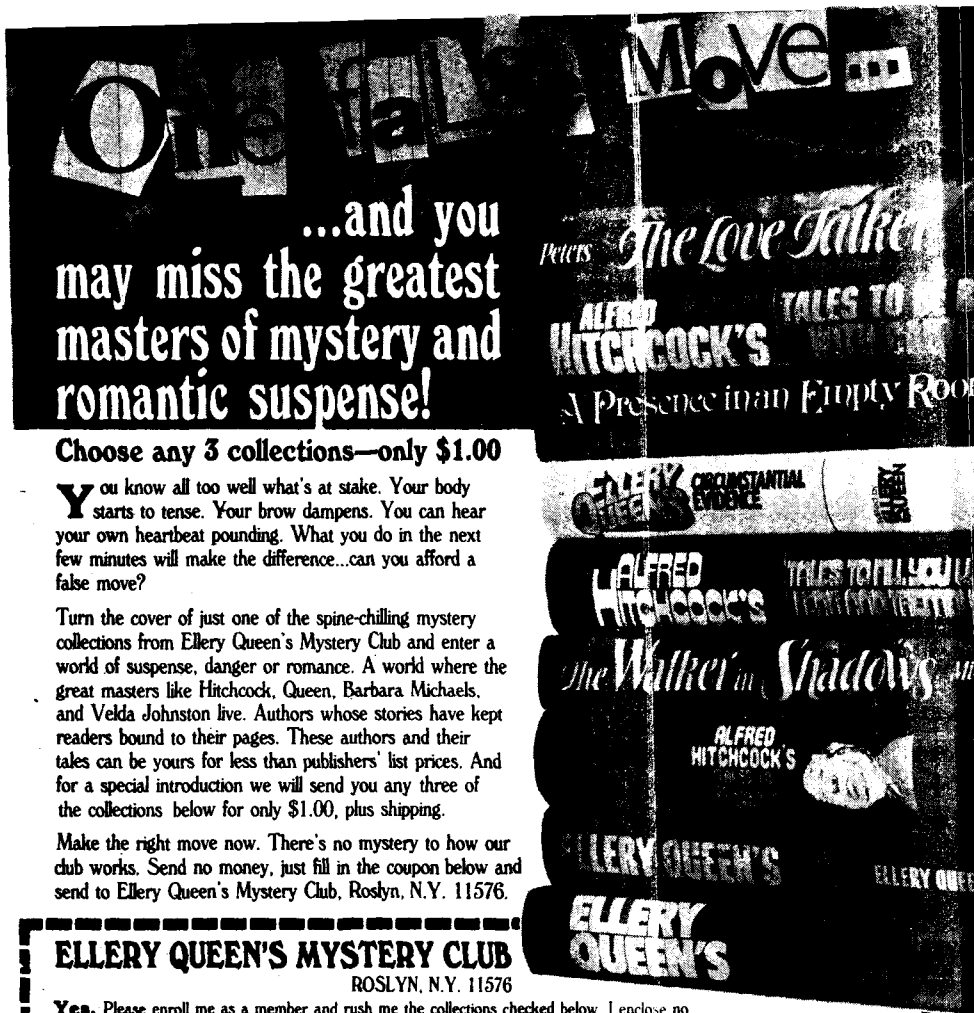

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a ***NEW*** short story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Below the escarpment the scrub-oak hills tumbled toward the canyon bottom. Sunlight dappled mica particles in the rocks; once in a while you could get a glimpse of deer down there—occasionally a coyote. The gorge curled to the left; out of sight beyond those massive shoulders of rock and brush lurked the blighted plastic sprawl of Santa Monica and Los Angeles . . .

One of two stories in this issue—both by Edgar-winning writers—that reflect growing alarm over the relentless, pernicious greed that is destroying our natural resources and defacing the beauty of our land . . .

THE VIEW

by BRIAN GARFIELD

The day before the murder I made the usual rounds.

Tom Todhunter's house on the hilltop was my next-to-last stop on Mondays and Thursdays. Normally I tried to arrive early because the old man was one of my favorite clients and I enjoyed provoking his stories about the early days. Today I was a bit late because I had other things on my mind—Marilynn and the problem of Stanley Orcutt.

Steep and sinuous, the narrow road was a low-gear climb to its cul-de-sac end. I crimped the wheels into the curb and set the brake and glanced through the wrought-iron archway with its embroidered *T. X. T.* centered in filigree. Sometimes old Tom would await me there on the flagstone walk: he had exceptional hearing and could identify the particular grind of my van.

He wasn't in sight. I unloaded my gear from the van and lugged

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it to the door. I was preoccupied with my dilemma—mine and Marilynn's—and it must have been several minutes before I realized no one had answered the door. I rang the bell again and listened to the silence and felt a jolt of adrenalin: it was true he was in remarkable condition but Tom was just a month short of eighty-seven and I was alerted by the actuarial knowledge that any visit to him might be my last.

I left my things at the door and went around to the side, past the garage that housed Tom's huge old Packard and around a stand of bamboo and out along the red-tile walkway that led to the back of the property. I ducked under an arched trellis of purple bougainvillea and emerged onto the apron of the swimming pool. The vista was stunning: past the pool the hill plummeted into a brush-studded crumple of canyons and you could see a panorama that looked like the view from an airplane: mountain serrates along half the skyline and the Pacific Ocean along the rest—Catalina Island dark on the horizon. Today even the blue haze was gone; the hot Santa Anas were blowing out of the east and the air was glass-sharp for forty miles.

Tom was sitting in a high canvas director's chair, MR. TODHUNTER painted across the back. He scowled out at the vista, so lost in thought he didn't hear me behind him until I spoke:

"Are you all right?"

It startled him. "No." Then his back stiffened. He twisted to look at me. "Who? —It's you, Christopher. 'Time's it?"

"Ten after three. Sorry I'm late, sir. Are you all—"

He squinted at me the way he'd squinted at rustlers, land-grabbers, and other "B"-picture varmints. His rasping deep voice had a younger man's timbre. "Of course I'm all right."

"You didn't answer the doorbell . . ."

"I see," he said. "Listen: just because I don't answer every damn bell that rings doesn't mean you need to call the undertakers just yet."

I watched him brace both gnarled hands on the arms of the chair and heave himself to his feet. He kept looking out at the canyon but his attention was elsewhere: somewhere inside him.

After a moment he glanced at me. "Thank you for your concern. I guess you want to get started."

I smiled assent and began to turn away but his voice arrested me: "Look down there."

I tried to figure out what he was looking at. Below the escarpment

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the scrub-oak hills tumbled toward the canyon bottom. Sunlight dappled mica particles in the rocks; once in a while you could get a glimpse of deer down there—occasionally a coyote. The gorge curled to the left; out of sight beyond those massive shoulders of rock and brush lurked the blighted plastic sprawl of Santa Monica and Los Angeles.

He said, "They used to set the camera tripod right up here and I used to climb up on that big white horse and chase bad guys all through those trees. Real good angle from right here, looking north so you never got the sun in the lens. My dad was a director, you know."

"I know."

"We made forty-eight pictures together. Way back—silent-movie days. Before your time. I used to know every rock and every bush. See that clump of juniper? We used to have a soft bed of sand right below there. I'd ride up alongside of old Fred Kohler or Charlie King and jump him from my horse onto his horse and we'd both take a tumble right on the sand there. I always won those hand-to-hands, of course. The good guy. I like happy endings, you know . . . Did our own stunts in those days, mainly."

Usually he enjoyed reminiscing but he seemed sour today. He said: "Enjoy the view while you can."

"What do you mean?"

At first he didn't answer.

From here only five or six houses were visible, strewn haphazardly about, each one trailing an umbilical driveway that depended circuitously to the paved two-lane highway by the river. The biggest of those houses was Marilynn Orcutt's and I'd be going there directly after finishing up with Tom.

Even from here it was imposing: a Spanish grandee had built the hacienda with its adobe outbuildings, its corrals and its red-tile roofs around the open courtyard. You could have held scrimmages in that courtyard.

Tom's place was fifty or sixty years old; the hacienda down there dated back to the Eighteenth Century. Stanley Orcutt had modernized it. Even from up here, nearly a mile above it, I could hear the slap and pound of the diesel generator that provided electricity for the hacienda. Sound carried far in these mountains.

The hacienda was tucked into a steep canyon and it commanded only a narrow wedge of a view. Like the grandees, Marilynn's hus-

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band didn't care about views unless you could measure them monetarily.

Tom's voice startled me with its bitterness: he spat the words as if they were bitter-tasting insects that had flown into his mouth:

"Resort complex. *Condominiums.*"

Then he went into the house.

I brought my gear into the spare bedroom and set up the folding massage table and laid out the oils and conditioners. There was an oil portrait of Tom's late wife as she'd been in her thirties: a pert redhead with a huge smile. She'd died five or six years ago but still whenever he mentioned her his voice went soft with love.

Wrapped in a big towel he came into the room carrying a rolled-up newspaper. He set it aside and climbed aboard the table face-down. He was smaller than he'd been as a young man; a bit gaunt now, nothing left of the robust beer belly he'd carried during his last few paunchy years in the saddle on the Monogram Pictures back lot, and his face was crosshatched with cracks but it was still recognizably the face I'd seen in all those black-and-white programmers: the same slant of the pale eyes, the familiar heavy thrust of the big jaw.

I began to knead his left foot. "Something interesting in the newspaper?"

"There is." He didn't explain.

After a bit I said, "You're remarkably fit. You still contend you haven't got a portrait hidden away in the attic someplace?"

"You can't take personal credit for longevity. It's just blind luck." Then the ghost of the familiar big grin: "But if you push me into a corner with a microphone in my face I'll attribute it to booze, broads, and 'bacco."

He lapsed silent for a while. Occasionally he'd grunt when I probed a knotted muscle too hard. The old man was a hedonist; he vocalized his pleasure with sighs and groans.

I'd met him two years ago in the hospital: I did two days a week of physiotherapy there and he'd just had surgery for prostate cancer and they'd sent me in to make him more comfortable. After a few days they'd sent him home but he'd asked me to continue working on him as a private client. Eighty-four and he'd only just discovered the benefits of massage.

The first few months he'd been fragile and tentative, scared by looming mortality. But then the doctors had told him it looked as if they'd caught it in time and he was in remission. After that he'd perked right up and found a young writer who was eager to ghost-

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write The Thomas X. Todhunter Story, and what with that and his glorious view and his numerous friends and his sippin' whisky and his twice-weekly massage he was a happy man.

One Thursday afternoon Tom had confided in me: "Some of those old boys likely to get real uncomfortable—the ones that ain't dead yet. The rest, I expect they'll be rolling cartwheels in their graves. Listen: I could've been dead in the operating room. I'm way past the allotted threescore and ten. Borrowed time, Christopher. What've I got to lose? I'm telling it plain and true, boy. I'm letting the buffalo chips fall wherever they want to." His laughter was loud and wild.

I did the legs and arms and then got down to serious business on his back. He liked to hear the joints crack when I manipulated them.

Finally I worked his face and head and neck. That was his favorite; I could always count on his ritual approval: "I swear if you could bottle that you could sell it for millions."

But he didn't say it today. He just got off the table and held the towel around him, stared a while at his wife's portrait—brooding, as if he needed her counsel about something. A sudden suspicion grenaded into me and I said, "Did you get the results from that check-up you had last week?"

"Sure." He dismissed the question casually. "Everything's negative—everything's fine. I'll live to be at least a hundred and five." He nodded his head emphatically to confirm it. "I'm not going to fall down, boy. They're going to have to *knock* me down."

Then he picked up the rolled newspaper and looked at it and the sudden disgust in his voice was profound:

"Seems my neighbor Mr. Stanley Orcutt has been buying up parcels of land. Seems he owns the better part of what you can see from here, excepting perhaps the Pacific Ocean. Seems he's put in for county permission to develop the land."

He flung the newspaper down on the massage table and poked an accusing finger toward the photograph. "Look at it."

It was Sunday's real-estate section. The headline was DEVELOPER PLANS TOPANGA CONDOS. The photo showed an architect's conception of hilltops tiered and flattened, each one supporting a random jumble of squat apartments that looked rather like children's toy blocks that might have been glued together at odd corners and then strewn askew.

Tom said: "Brings a whole new meaning to the word 'ugly,' doesn't it."

"Yes sir, I guess it does."

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"Arrogant fool wants to turn these mountains into a slum."

"Maybe it won't happen," I said.

The old man said, "Aagh," dismissing it with disbelief; and then he said: "Even his own wife hates what he's doing. You know the woman, don't you?"

I was packing the oils away in my doctor-style bag. "I know them both. I give them massages."

"Beautiful woman. She's got a sweet disposition."

"Yes sir, she does."

Tom gave me a speculative look. He was a man of the world. But he was gentleman enough to keep his suspicions to himself.

I gave the newspaper back to him so I could fold up the table. A few minutes later I said goodbye.

It was less than a mile as the crow might fly; but the road made it just two-tenths short of four miles and it was an eleven-minute journey in the van.

Just beyond the turn-off to Tom's house there was a lookout point at the side of the road—room for two or three parked cars—and from that curve you could see Orcutt's hacienda; beyond that point you couldn't see it any more because the hills got in the way.

I went on along to the Orcutt mailbox and drove up the gravel drive. The doors to the triple garage were open. The steel-grey Seville and Marilynn's white Mercedes convertible were in their stalls. The third stall was empty—from which I concluded that Stanley Orcutt was out somewhere in the Rolls, doing business—bringing more new meanings to the word "ugly."

A dented pickup was parked in the circular driveway. I saw lawnmowers and spreading machines in its stretch bed. *Gutierrez Gardening Service.* One of the gardeners was making a loud racket with one of those putt-putting backpack blowers, spraying high-pressure air along the entranceway to clear it of twigs and dead leaves. He nodded to me and smiled when I carried my gear past him.

The cleaning lady admitted me to the house and then left me on my own; I was hired help, not deserving of an escort, and I knew the way. I went on back to the exercise room.

Marilynn was in the sauna. I announced myself and heard her voice through the wooden door: "I'll be right out." Then—mischievously: "Go ahead and start without me."

I set up the table and laid out the oils and cremes. She said: "Did your agent have any news about your script?"

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"They're still thinking about it at the network. 'Taking' meetings."

"Don't be too crestfallen if they don't buy it, Christopher. Everyone knows they're idiots. The script's probably too good for them." Her voice hadn't revealed anxiety but when she came out of the sauna I could see it in her eyes.

She was in a green terrycloth robe that matched the color of her eyes. A few wisps of disobedient yellow hair protruded from the towel she'd turbaned around her head. Despite the dressing-room garb she carried herself with glamourous languid grace. She went to the door and looked out into the corridor. When she was satisfied, she pushed it shut and locked it and came back to the table. Soft and hot from the sauna, she came right into my arms.

Despite the heat she was trembling.

After a long while she went away from me, crossing the room. There was anger in her and she was too jangly to lie in my embrace. From the far side of the room she watched me for the longest time and then said, "What would you say—would you think I was insane if I told you I am seriously thinking about committing murder?"

"It's come down to that, has it?"

She took a deep breath as if to calm herself. "He's gone public. Did you see the monstrosity in yesterday's paper?"

"Tom Todhunter showed it to me."

"Tom phoned here yesterday. I could have heard him without a telephone. Stanley wasn't here. He was in Malibu or someplace, playing games with balance sheets or whatever that crowd does. I think he's involved in cocaine deals—I can't prove it, it's just a feeling. Anyway—what was I talking about? Oh. Old Tom Todhunter—he called yesterday. I already said that, didn't I—you can see how upset I am . . . When Tom calmed down I told him I'm just as furious about it as he is. I'm really fond of him. He's such a dear old thing." She composed herself and came back to the subject at hand. "I've been sorting out murder methods. Poison—a gun—a knife—holding his head under the swimming pool . . ."

I said, "You don't have to kill anybody. Just divorce him."

She released a tiny laugh into the room. "I'm going to. But I won't get a penny from him, you know. I signed that damned pre-nuptial agreement. He *owes* me . . ."

I took her in my arms. "Forget it. We'll get by. Why, when I'm a famous screenwriter we'll be able to buy and sell guys like Stanley."

"I know a couple of successful writers," she said. "You've got an exaggerated idea of how much money they make."

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"Is money that important to you?"

"I honestly don't know, Christopher. I've never been without it."

Her father had inherited the family business and Marilynn had grown up on the wealthy coast of Rhode Island—*old* money country, where families were aged in wood like good whisky—but her father had gambled it all away, everything including the button factory. By that time she'd already married Stanley Orcutt.

Astonishing how unpredictably people could change. When Marilynn married Orcutt she'd been just out of Vassar and he'd been young, vigorous, blond, and handsome, a Yale man with lineage as impeccable as her own. They both came from the sort of families that guarded their riches jealously: that was why the pre-nuptial agreements had been signed—contracts by which neither of them could lay hands on the other's fortune. As things had turned out, Marilynn's fortune evaporated while Stanley's multiplied.

She was one of those fair-skinned ice princesses and he was the rich son of an ambitious father and he'd inherited both the wealth and the ambition: he was determined to keep getting richer, and in the process he grew a belly and lost his charm and humanity along with the hair on his scalp. Now he was just another middle-aged overweight hustler—only richer and more powerful than most; and a lot more dangerous: he'd developed the instincts and the personality of a boa constrictor.

He had the remains of a healthy constitution but the muscles were layered over with flab and he depended on massages rather than exercise to keep him from falling apart completely. Providing his semi-weekly rubdowns was no pleasure for me and I wouldn't have kept him as a client if it hadn't been for Marilynn. I hadn't planned on falling in love with her—or on her falling in love with me.

She said: "He doesn't want to hear the word divorce. I'm his property, bought and paid for. That's how he sees it. I'm decorative and decorous. The proper hostess. You have to read between the lines with Stanley because he's too clever to say anything outright that you might hold against him later—but his meaning is clear enough. If I try to divorce him he'll make life a holy hell for me and anybody connected with me."

"Come on, darling. Aren't you dramatizing just a little? He's not a gangster."

"I'm not talking about breaking your arms and legs. He's more subtle than that. You'd never sell a script in this town, I suspect. You'd get fired by the hospital. Your clients would begin to phone

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you—so sorry, but we're going to have to dispense with your services. And then maybe the state would find some irregularity in your license to practice physiotherapy . . ." She was looking at the floor, in a dismal frame of mind. "You and I—we'd end up on food stamps."

"Better that than Death Row," I said gently. "You weren't serious, were you?"

"About murdering him?" She looked up at last: she met my eyes. "Honestly, I don't know whether I'm serious or not. God knows he's made me hate him enough—"

"Hey," I said quietly. "Murder isn't a solution. Murder's a problem."

With a wan attempt at a smile she folded herself against me. "What are we going to do, then?"

"I wish I knew."

It was just after five Tuesday when the phone in my apartment rang. I'd only been home half an hour or so; I was sucking beer from a can and wrestling at the typewriter with a clumsy transition in the new script. The strident demand of the telephone annoyed me and I was inclined not to answer but after the fourth ring I knew my concentration was broken so I picked it up, stifling anger. "Hello?"

"Christopher—I need help . . ."

Her voice brought me bolt upright in the chair. "Marilynn—what is it?"

"Stanley . . . He's dead . . . Two shots; two bullets . . . Can you come—right away?"

"I don't believe it," I said lamely. "What happened?"

"Please—can you just come up? *Now?* I need you, darling . . ."

She sounded forlorn, waiflike—an urchin begging for solace. I flung the van up the Pacific Coast Highway toward Topanga Canyon, cursing the clots of traffic that slowed me. I was filled with alarm and fear. Not for Stanley but for Marilynn: the implications of what she'd said were enough to put the coppery taste of fear on my tongue.

Going up the corkscrew road I heard a police siren somewhere ahead of me. I went caroming past the turnoff to Tom Todhunter's place and a moment later was slithering through the sharp bend where the lookout point gave me a glimpse of the hacienda. I could see the three-car garage from there—the doors open as they always were, all three cars parked abreast in the stalls. There were no vehicles parked in the driveway.

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As I sped away from the viewpoint I heard a crack of sound that could have been a gunshot; it was half obscured by the wailing sirens up-canyon and I couldn't be sure.

The police would get there ahead of me. Still, she must have telephoned me quite some time before she'd called them; they'd be from the Malibu sheriff's station and I'd had farther to come. If it hadn't been for the evening traffic I'd have been there ahead of them.

When I made the turn onto the gravel driveway I was hoping she'd have the sense to say nothing at all: nothing except, "I want to see my lawyer." I wondered if she had one. Surely with all Stanley's shady dealings and high-powered contacts she must know a good lawyer . . .

The two black-and-white sheriff's cars were parked just behind Tom Todhunter's distinctive old Packard. I left the van in the driveway, not bothering to move it out of anyone's way, and went at a run up to the house. I didn't ring the bell; the door was half open and I just walked inside. I could hear voices just along the corridor and went that way to the open door of Orcutt's study.

I heard an unfamiliar male voice: "There's three empties in the cylinder here. I only see two wounds. Anybody see a bullet hole in the furniture or anyplace?"

As I arrived at the door I heard Tom Todhunter say, "It could have gone out that window there."

They all were in that room: three men in deputy uniforms; one official-looking man with iron-grey hair in a khaki-colored suit and tie; Marilynn slumped in a chair looking faint; Tom Todhunter on his feet with his back flat against the bookcase, looking down at Stanley Orcutt—at least I assumed it was Orcutt. The dead man was lying on the floor with his back to me and there were two darkening stains on the back of his shirt. The smell in the room was acrid and not pleasant. I noticed the window beyond the desk was wide open; a bit of a breeze tickled my face.

One of the cops discovered me in the doorway and went rigid. "Who's this—who's this?"

It made Marilynn look up. She said: "Oh, thank God." I went toward her as she rose to her feet; I embraced her.

The one in plainclothes with the steel-colored hair said, "What's your name?"

"Christopher Ainsworth," I answered. "What's yours?"

"McKittrick." Then he added, with emphasis, "Sergeant McKittrick." He had a pencil in his hand. From it a revolver dangled

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by its trigger guard. He turned to one of the uniformed cops and said, "Bag this," and the cop produced a folded transparent plastic bag from his pocket. McKittrick dropped the revolver into it and the cop sealed the bag shut with a twist-tie and wrote something on its tag.

Old Tom Todhunter said to me, "You see that, boy? Even dead he's still ugly." He looked down at the dead man again.

During all this Marilynn clung to me, squeezing me with great violence as if by pressing herself close enough she could draw strength directly from me. She was breathing very fast. Weeping now; drawing in great sucking gasps. I held her in a tender grip and stroked her hair: "Okay, all right, take it easy now, just try to relax, it's okay, you'll be all right, go ahead and let it out"—talking to her as you'd talk to a skittish animal, just letting the words flow, trying to make the voice soothing.

Over her head I could see Tom Todhunter's cracked-leather face. He was gazing at us—at me or at Marilynn, I couldn't tell which—and he looked preternaturally sad: compassion and concern flowed from his eyes. Then he turned to McKittrick and held his gnarled hands out, wrists together. "You got handcuffs or something?"

McKittrick said, "I guess we won't need them."

"You think I couldn't make a run for it? You think I'm too old?"

I didn't understand. "What's going on? What are you talking about?"

Marilynn blurted out a sobbing cry. She turned in the circle of my arms and tried to focus through her tears. In a half strangled voice she said: "For God's sake, don't let him—"

"Never mind!" old Tom roared. "I'll confess any damn time I please. I've done us all a favor here. This world's better off without that ugly man and his ugly condominiums. I ain't sorry. I'd do it again."

She struggled to break free of my grasp. "Tom—you can't—"

"Honey love," the old man said, "I can and I did. Now just hush up and let your young man take care of you there. There's nothing you can do now. Nothing that happens now is going to change the way things are—this man can't get any deader." He prodded the corpse with his toe; it prompted one of the cops to grip his arm and pull him away; and Tom said in a dust-dry voice, "Sorry—I didn't mean to disturb the evidence."

Then he turned to Marilynn. "I expect you stand to inherit from him. You're not going to go ahead building those ugly things, are

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you? You won't ugly up this landscape—I know you won't. That's what counts. The view."

By then I had it figured out and when Marilynn opened her mouth to speak another objection, I squeezed her arms very hard. It was surreptitious and the cops couldn't possibly notice it, but she felt it all right and she didn't speak again.

After a while they took Tom away.

I parked the van in front of the archway and walked in below his initials, carried my gear into the house and started to work. He took a long swallow of bourbon and grunted with pleasure. "First rubdown in nearly two weeks. Only things I've been missing—rubdowns and good whisky. Hadn't been for that I wouldn't have minded staying in jail. Nice comfortable private cell and the food's not too bad. But now you're here I'm glad they made bail for me. By the way—I didn't get your bill for last month."

"It's on the house."

"Come on. I may be under indictment but I'm not broke."

I said, "We owe you more than anybody can ever pay."

"Well, somebody had to stop him before he ruined this whole countryside."

"That's not what I mean. And you know it."

"She told you, did she?"

"No. I figured it out for myself. I haven't said a word to her."

"Nor she to you? I wonder how long she can keep it bottled up." Then he twisted his head to squint up at me. "How'd you figure it out?"

"I came up the road just behind the police. When I looked across the canyon there weren't any cars parked in Orcutt's driveway. And I heard a gunshot. I could hear it; the police couldn't—not with those sirens right above their heads. A few minutes later I came up the driveway and your Packard was parked there, in front of the police cars. You got there just a couple minutes ahead of the cops. You took the gun away from her and you fired a shot out the window—so that they'd find powder burns on your hand. How'd you know about it? Did she telephone you?"

"No. I heard the two shots—you know how sound carries in these hills. I went out by the pool to have a look around and I saw her come running out of the house over there and then run back inside. Too far to see much but I could tell she was distraught all right. Put that together with the noise of the shots I'd heard—I guessed some-

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thing was wrong. I decided to go over and see if I could help. But the Packard wouldn't start up right away and I had to hook up the quick-charger on the battery for fifteen, twenty minutes. Then I heard the sirens coming up from the bottom and I knew I'd need to hurry."

I said, "You gave her back her life."

"Well, she's a sweet thing. She was going to tell you about it but I told her to hold off—I thought you might take it better coming from me. Look, he goaded her into it, he provoked it, he drove her to it the same way the picador drives the bull to it in the ring. Mr. Stanley Orcutt might as well have pulled the trigger himself. He'd found out about you. He was going to have you—*punished*. That's how he put it. He flaunted that in front of her. He was going to run you out of business and then he made some talk about breaking your hands real good so you'd never massage anybody again. And of course naturally she was never to see you again. So forth, etcetera, so on."

I said, "Your check-up last week—"

"Well, they found cancer. I guess it's metastasized. I won't be alive to go to trial." The side of his face that I could see was smiling. "I kind of like happy endings," he said.

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"Twenty to thirty million dollars isn't funny, you know," Horvath said . . .

NOTHING TO JOKE ABOUT

by BROWNING NORTON

When Arnold stepped into the luggage department at Bosch & Splendor's, a veteran clerk named Horvath nudged a newly hired man named Pewter.

"There he is now."

It was late afternoon of a slow spring day, with only a scattering of clientele idling among the displays.

"There who is now?" Pewter asked guardedly.

"Look more to your right. Arnold deBracken Bates, that's who. You asked me a little while ago how often he came in, and I said about once a week."

Following Horvath's discreet glance, Pewter was taken by a shock of surprise. Arnold deBracken Bates did not look the way the new clerk had envisioned him—he was, in fact, considerably more impressive. A photograph is one thing. The picture the manager showed new employees was a true likeness of Arnold, yet there was something, a trick of lighting perhaps, that to an acute eye translated into a vague impression of personality flaw. But Arnold in the flesh was another proposition. Tall and slim, smooth dark hair—early Cary Grant, Pewter decided—strong, even features in a rather sharp face, movements graceful with a lithe lazy rhythm. About twenty-nine or thirty, perhaps.

"I'll bet he's standing in eight hundred dollars' worth of threads," Pewter murmured in an awed tone.

"Easily," Horvath agreed complacently. "My guess is that silk suit was done up by Darnell. And those shoes—imported bench, certainly. To say nothing of—"

Arnold, after nodding casually to someone at the far end, had strolled out of the department.

"Well, I guess *we* don't have to worry about him," Pewter said

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with a little chuckle. "A piece of luggage is a little too big an item to glom off and stick in your pock—" He stopped abruptly. Horvath was giving him the fishy eye.

"Arnold is nothing to joke about," Horvath said stiffly. "I'm sure they warned you never to mention him to anyone outside Bosch & Splendor's."

"Uh, I didn't mean any—"

"Twenty to thirty million dollars isn't funny, you know."

"*That* much? Not in his own name?"

"In the family. And he's an only child. I forgot you're from out of town, Pewter. The deBracken fortune is old money, goes way back. And Arnold's late grandfather Bates, they say, made his pile in shipping. Arnold's father and mother live on an estate outside the city when they're in town, but Arnold's got a bachelor pad in one of those ritzy condos on the Hill. I've heard he draws fifty thousand a year after taxes from a family trust. Just walking-around money."

Pewter whistled soundlessly. "Fifty thou! Why would a guy with all that going for him want to come in here and mooch?"

"We avoid discussing angles like that, Pewter."

Pewter, irritated by Horvath's lofty tone, recalled Security Briefing at the time of his hiring. The drill that had dealt with general thievery was familiar—he had worked in top-class establishments elsewhere. "Why so hush-hush?" he demanded grumpily. "Everybody here has the same details on Arnold, haven't they? After the security chief gets through, the manager, Mr. Everby, comes out and shows you a picture of this guy, and hems and haws around."

"Mr. Everby doesn't hem and haw, Pewter."

"He did with me," Pewter said doggedly. "When I finally got his drift I said, 'You mean this Arnold's a shoplifter?' And Mr. Everby said, 'Tut tut, young man! To Bosch & Splendor's, Arnold and his parents are valued patrons. And don't you ever forget that. Fine old family . . .' And so forth. Then he told me quietly what to do when Arnold is in my section. Keep an unobtrusive eye on him. If he shoplifts some article—selects and pockets, as Mr. Everby put it—don't under any circumstances accost or embarrass him, or even seem to notice. Simply make a note of the incident covertly—date, item, and price if possible—sign and send it on to the executive office. The bills for Arnold's little pickups go quietly to his papa and mama, who pay them just as quietly, and apparently say nothing to anyone. Right?"

"Yes, but I said we avoid discussing—"

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"Okay, only just this. What about the other stores, Horvath? How come someone at Hornings, or at Sacks & Roamer doesn't put the arm on Arnold during one of his lifts?"

"Because," Horvath said with exaggerated patience, "the other top stores in and around town know him and have the same quiet arrangements with his family that we have. As to the cheap chains and second-rate emporiums, Arnold wouldn't be caught dead in one of them anyway. Now can we drop the subject?"

Meanwhile, Arnold was sauntering through a number of departments, unaware of the veiled attention he received in each as he passed. He loved this big glittering store best of all, and now and again he nodded to clerks whose faces he remembered vaguely.

Thus, after taking an indirect route—a maneuver he considered shrewd—he arrived at his real destination, the men's gift shop on the third floor. The last time in here he'd seen a tray of silver belt-buckles that had taken his fancy. He would have liked to pick up one of them. He probably could have done so then, he decided now. An unbroken string of successes as far back as he could remember had made him think himself invincible in his avocation. His hand was quicker than anybody's eye. But on his last visit the male clerk had been standing virtually over the buckles, talking to a customer who was leaning on the display case. Arnold had hesitated and backed off.

Today, however, he saw that picking up a buckle was going to be as easy as starting the motor on his Mercedes. At this late hour the display case was unattended. The only clerk visible stood at the far end of the shop where three customers were clustered. No one was in this section except himself.

In this assumption, however, he was mistaken.

The shop's windows, flanking the door through which he had entered from men's furnishings, were draped with a dark material. A young woman in a navy-blue dress stood perfectly still, backed against the dark drapes. She had seen him coming, but because of her total immobility and the blending of drapes and dress, he had passed without seeing her.

She was attractive, not quite so young as at first glance perhaps. Medium-brown hair, neat figure, luminous green eyes, a vivid, expressive face that could simulate authentic sexy allure. Betty Hanson was the name she was using at the moment. This was her first

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contact with Arnold, but thanks to Mr. Everby's photo she recognized him at once.

As Arnold moved casually toward the display case that housed the silver buckles, Betty made sure her name tag was in place above her left breast. Actually, she was in Security, presently assigned to men's furnishings. The regular clerk in this end of the gift shop, Joe Carsich, had just asked her to hold the fort while he dodged out for a smoke.

The credentials she'd presented to Bosch & Splendor's were faked. She was using the store to cool off from heat in Tampa, Florida, generated when she and a male partner had clipped a prosperous Tampa citizen in a con game. She had flown north, her partner west, with plans to reunite later.

She watched Arnold approach the display case. Shielding the action with his body, he slid the panel, reached in, whisked out one of the silver buckles, slipped it into his jacket pocket, closed the panel, and turned away, seemingly in one graceful motion.

Not too bad, at that, Betty Hanson thought with amusement.

This was her cue to record the incident for the executive office, but she didn't do it. Betty had plans of her own. She'd been interested in Arnold ever since learning about him and the deBracken Bates millions. Now she approached him, being careful to keep the room's central pillar between her and the other clerk at the far end.

"You're Arnold deBracken Bates, aren't you?" She hit him with all the charm she could muster, but his reaction was far from anything she'd expected or was accustomed to.

He was startled. His face twisted and he worked hard to smooth it out, like a small boy caught red-handed in the jam jar. He made an involuntary motion toward his jacket pocket, and then dropped his arm. He stared at her blankly. A pulse beat in his temple. Surely he couldn't be scared? Baffled, Betty eyed him narrowly for a moment, and changed her tactics. She made her tone bantering. "What do you have in your right jacket pocket, Arnold?"

"Nothing," he said quickly. "Nothing!"

"Hadn't you better say a silver belt-buckle?"

Panic, a shock of it. He eyed her sidewise, like a skittish horse, and his lips trembled faintly. The impossible had happened! She had seen him! Nobody before had ever seen him. She must be very clever. Now she would—what? Call the manager? He knew old Mr. Everby. Dignified—like his own father and mother. Would Mr. Everby call the police? That was what happened, wasn't it, when people got

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caught? He thought of his dear kind father and mother. They mustn't find out, they *mustn't!*

"I'll put it back," he muttered desperately, glancing around. There were no other store personnel nearby. "I'll give you money. I have—quite a bit, you know."

While she watched, all but open-mouthed with astonishment, he swung swiftly to the display case, replaced the buckle in the tray, and returned to her.

Betty recovered herself. "Nevertheless, I still know that you took it," she said.

"Are you going to tell?"

"I don't want to tell, Arnold, and I won't if you'll be nice to me."

He looked faintly relieved. "You're Betty, aren't you? It's on your name tag there. I—you mustn't tell. What do you want me to do, Betty?"

She needed time to sort out her racing thoughts, determine how to take advantage of the situation. Arnold's shoplifting for fun made him a kleptomaniac, a neurotic, a bit of a nut. But he had revealed another more startling abnormality. Probably few people outside his family knew him well enough to be aware of it. He had a boy's mentality in a handsome man's body.

"Meet me in the Mill Room at the Arlington at seven o'clock and buy me a drink. We'll talk then. Do you know where it is?"

He nodded. "All right, I will."

"Be sure. Don't forget I still know you stole the buckle."

A frown crossed his brow. "I told you I'd be there, didn't I?"

But she wasn't sure of him until he stepped into the foyer that was a passage from the Arlington's main lobby. Then she knew by his disturbed expression that she'd be able to handle him. She smiled, rose, and took his arm.

In a banquette, she ordered a vodka martini, Arnold a Coke. She made no comment on his choice. If he was a non-drinker, though, he might be more difficult to handle. She had concluded, from the absence of toadying on the part of the help, that he wasn't known here.

She caught him looking at her and quickly shying away. "What is it, Arnold?" she asked him blandly.

"It's— I'm wondering what you want me to do."

"For not telling about the silver buckle?" She watched him wince. "I told you. I want you to be nice to me."

"Why?"

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"Why? Because I'm lonely. Don't you think I'm pretty?"

"Yes, but—"

"Is it so hard to be nice to me?"

"No."

They ate dinner there, and while they were sipping coffee she said, "I'm expecting you to take me home, Arnold."

"All right."

Night had fallen when they drove away in his Mercedes. She'd watched him tip the night attendant who brought out the car. Two dollars. Everything on the grand scale. A well bred twelve-year-old man with $50,000 a year and a mania for shoplifting.

Her apartment was in a complex out toward the university, a big plaza with shops, two movie houses, and a steady blast of lights and rock music. He lucked in at a curb parking meter and walked her across the street through the soft spring night. They went in at a side door.

"Let's take the stairs, not the elevator," she said. "It's only the second floor."

The apartment was standard, but all he saw of it was a cramped living room, with its smell of new synthetic materials, a couch backed by a decorative table, a matching chair, a tiny desk and upholstered stool, and a few execrable prints on the walls.

"Sit down, Arnold. No, on the couch—it's more comfortable."

He perched lithely but gingerly on one end of the couch.

Betty had been thinking furiously. There was no chance to get at the deBracken Bates big money—unfortunately, that would be safe behind a phalanx of lawyers, trusts, and investments—but she could make a dent in Arnold if she could lure him out of town and get in touch with her partner.

She sat down very close to him and extended one shapely leg along the couch seat. "Arnold, have you ever been to Atlantic City?"

"No, I never have. We—"

She leaned back to let him smell her hair and spoke over her shoulder. "Tomorrow I want you to take me there for a few days."

He jumped. "Atlantic City! I can't do that!"

"Why not? Of course you can."

"The day after tomorrow I'm going to our place in Maine with my father and mother."

"Do you want me to tell them I saw you steal an expensive item in Bosch & Splendor's?"

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His face went white. For an instant she felt almost sorry for him, and then she wanted to laugh. What supreme irony! He was desperately afraid they'd find out what they already knew.

"I won't tell them if you'll be nice and take me to Atlantic City," she said. "You can join your family later." She put her other leg up, showing a tempting length of thigh, and leaned forward to smooth her hose.

He swallowed repeatedly and stared at her back. She wouldn't tell—if this, and if that. Vaguely he sensed in her a cool nerve and an unyielding ruthlessness. He recalled his mother's oft-repeated words: *Arnold you simply cannot trust outside people. You mustn't expect that you can.*

A plastic bag of a size to have held three or four grapefruit lay on the table behind the couch. While she was still leaning forward he reached for it and opened it like a stocking cap. When she leaned back toward him he pulled it down hard over her head and twisted it tight at the back of her neck with his left hand. She made a gasping sound and reached frantically to tear the thing off, but he was quicker, clamping her arms to her sides with his right arm. She lost precious breath in a smothered yell, then tried to thrash off the couch and break his hold, but it was no use, he was too strong. Her heels beat a frenzied tattoo on the cushions, a dull pumping sound that went on for minutes, then she strained in a great paroxysm of effort and collapsed. Still he held her, unsure. Maybe she was faking.

When he could stand it no longer, he jumped up and let her sprawl on the couch. He tried to make her sit up but she wouldn't stay. It was horrible the way she kept flopping over in a heap. He lifted her and put her onto the narrow matching chair, arranging her to lean back in it, the chair's arms keeping her in position. He straightened her dress and slowly eased the bag from her head, folded it, and slid it into his jacket pocket. Her hair was hardly mussed at all. Patting it into place here and there, he saw she would never tell about the buckle. Her face was bluish, swollen, and discolored, her nostrils distended, her eyes half open and dilated. A faint froth clung to her lips. He looked away quickly, went to the door, switched the room into darkness, and peered outside. There was no one in the hall. He set the night latch on the door and stepped out.

There was no one in the stairway to the side door either. On the way to his car he dropped the plastic bag into a trash can.

At eleven the next morning he went back to Bosch & Splendor's.

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He didn't want to go there, and he wouldn't have except that he had remembered something important. If a horse throws you, you've got to mount up again right away before you lose your nerve. If you crash a plane at the controls you've got to go up again as soon as possible.

When he stepped into the men's gift shop, Joe Carsich and another clerk named Rudy were standing together halfway down the shop. They noted his presence absently.

Joe Carsich was talking with some heat. "It's getting so you can't depend on anyone. I had a date with the dentist for ten-thirty and this dame Hanson said she'd stand in for me. She hasn't showed up at all this morning."

"You could have personnel call her."

"They did. She didn't answer the phone."

Arnold moved over to look into the display case, turned a shoulder toward the two clerks for an instant or two, and then strolled out of the shop.

Rudy said, "You want me to?"

"Oh, I'll do it," Joe Carsich said irritably and scribbled on a pad:

5/18/83
Arnold deB.B. Men's Gift Shop
1 silver belt-buckle, $175.00
clerk: Carsich

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a *NEW* Ganelon story by

JAMES POWELL

The man in the passenger seat raised a bullhorn and as the truck inched along, his magnified voice proclaimed, "New refrigerators for old! New refrigerators for old!"

Four floors above the Quai des Matelots Captain Maurice said, "I can't understand what Grotz is up to. He knows I'm not going to let any damned refrigerator through that door . . ."

THE BIRD-OF-PARADISE MAN

by JAMES POWELL

Late one hot summer afternoon a large unmarked truck drove out of San Sebastiano's rue Rivarol and turned westward at a snail's pace onto the Quai des Matelots. The man in the passenger seat raised a bullhorn and as the truck inched along, his magnified voice proclaimed, "New refrigerators for old! New refrigerators for old!"

The loiterers enjoying the harbor breeze along the stone wall of the embankment turned around. The women leaning on their windowsills above the street craned to see beyond the fluttering curtains. Again the man with the bullhorn announced he would trade everyone on that block a brand new refrigerator of the latest design for their old refrigerator.

At this part of its length, the Quai des Matelots overlooked the fishing-fleet basin of the Old Port. The street floors of the narrow stucco buildings were occupied by sea-related shops: a small ship-chandler's, the branch office of a maritime insurance company, a diving-equipment dealership, a sponge importer. The inhabitants of the upper floors were sea-related, too, and knew worldly goods to be slippery, elusive things which, once caught, must be held onto

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tightly. Their eyes went round with surprise and then narrowed suspiciously.

Madame Faustine, the wife of a wholesale scrimshaw knickknack man, was the first to step forward. She'd been meaning to replace her old refrigerator anyway.

The man with the bullhorn ordered the driver to stop the truck. Two giants in blue coveralls jumped down from the back. He signaled them to follow after Madame Faustine, who indicated her fifth-floor window. The crowd laughed nervously as the two giants exchanged unhappy glances. When Madame Faustine reappeared several minutes later, the two men were right behind her, sweating under the burden of an ancient, once-white machine now as brown as the summer polar bear at the St. Felix Zoo.

Madame Faustine smiled around at her neighbors as if to say, Well, at least I've got the damn thing down for the trash to take away. Then she gave the man with the bullhorn a flat stare.

He did not hesitate. At his signal, the two men hoisted the old machine up onto the back of the truck and out of sight. Madame Faustine licked her lips nervously and looked down at the ground. Suddenly the crowd sucked in its collective breath. Madame Faustine looked up and her heart fluttered. The two giants emerged from the darkness of the truck interior working a magnificent new refrigerator out into the sunlight. The machine was as broad as a wardrobe, with two fine doors and a spigot for ice water. It was of the color called avocado. The women in the crowd groaned with envy.

As quickly as they brought the old refrigerator down, the two giants manhandled the new one across the street and through Madame Faustine's doorway. When they reappeared empty-handed, the crowd cheered and rushed to surround the cab of the truck. The man set his bullhorn down and proceeded calmly to business, repeating that he would give a new refrigerator for every old one offered.

By the time the five o'clock whistle blew at the fish-salting works in the next block, the man had given away four refrigerators and left one woman crying because his new machines were too wide to get up her staircase. Then the man announced it was quitting time. But he promised the truck would return the next morning at ten o'clock. And it would be business as usual. New refrigerators for old.

Like Haroun al Raschid, Caliph of Bagdad, who delighted in wandering the narrow streets and exotic bazaars of his city incognito, Prince Raoul of San Sebastiano sometimes felt the need to rub elbows

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with the simple folk of the principality, whose lives he suspected to be more real and marvelous than his own. When this fit was on him, he would kiss Princess Dixie, his beautiful American wife, on the cheek, toss little Wallace Adolphus, the Prince Royal, up into the air so he could catch him again, and leave by his private entrance in the palace wall. Then, bowing modestly to the applauding citizens or saluting policemen, he would hurry to the rue Blondin where his good friend Ambrose Ganelon had his detective agency and living quarters. There he would let Ganelon apply a scar or a full beard at the makeup table and they would disappear into the night in disguise.

Ganelon did not mind playing faithful vizier to Raoul's caliph now and then. The rulers of San Sebastiano and the four generations of Ambrose Ganelons were always close. But that family of brilliant detective minds had almost eliminated ingenious crime from the principality. Cases were few and fees far between. A modest trust fund was all that kept the agency plaque on the downstairs doorway and the wolf pack of international crime at bay. Invariably, Prince Raoul chose the end of the quarter when Ganelon was counting every franc for one of his little jaunts. Since royalty never carried money and Ganelon was expected to pick up the tab for these adventures, he favored visits to the derelicts in the soup line outside the Abbey of the Holy Vernicle. They did not, he knew, tour the underworld hangouts of the Duranceville Quarter or the cosmopolitan dance halls of the Quadrilateral as much as the prince might have liked.

In the week before the quarterly check, Ganelon often made do by dropping in on professional acquaintances and accepting their invitations to lunch, which sometimes became his only meal of the day. He had just such a plan in mind this morning when he turned onto the rue Morgue. There was the Coroner hurrying down the steps. Ganelon called and gave the man a cheery wave. The Coroner frowned at him and stepped into his car, leaving Ganelon on the sidewalk watching his lunch drive away.

He tried to get to Counter Intelligence headquarters and Colonel St. Cyr who was always honored to pick up a luncheon check. But though he hailed them, no police car would give him a lift as tradition demanded. Frustrated and hungry, the detective spent the afternoon browsing among the paintings of the Marbeuf Museum where the guards greeted his well known smile with blank stares.

At the end of this tedious and perplexing day, Ganelon mounted

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the fourth and last flight of stairs up to his office and bed-sitting room beneath the eaves of 18 bis rue Blondin to find Prince Raoul sitting on the top step with each elbow resting on a large laundry bag.

"Ah, Ambrose," said the prince with a disappointed smile, "I'd hoped you'd be free for a little excursion with Buzz Haycock." Buzz Haycock was the name the prince used when incognito, the hero of his favorite juvenile adventure books. "But I see you're on a case."

"And how do you deduce that?" asked Ganelon, who had been tutoring the prince in detective ways.

"Elementary, my dear Ambrose," said the prince. "You're wearing a false mustache."

Ganelon touched his upper lip and cursed to himself. Now everything was clear. Just before he reached the rue Morgue that morning, Ganelon had encountered a man on a street corner who was handing out sample four-packs of a new brand of cigarettes. The detective had accepted his windfall. Then he turned the corner, applied the mustache he always carried in his wallet in case of an emergency, and strolled back for another. He was so pleased at his good luck and cleverness that he forgot to take off his disguise. "The case is solved," said Ganelon, stripping off the mustache. "Where would you like to go?"

"We've been ignoring the fairer sex on our outings. Let's try that new Chez Lundi laundromat on the rue Rivarol and hear what the ladies are saying about our management of affairs of state. I brought along the royal napkins to add purpose to our presence."

"Good enough," said Ganelon, calculating the cost of the royal wash.

A half hour later, they were sitting in the bright plastic interior of the new Chez Lundi with suds and laundry spinning around on all sides, Prince Raoul lurking behind a black eye-patch and Ganelon trying to see around a putty nose. The women tending the wash discussed nothing but the wonderful event of that afternoon on the Quai des Matelots. Raoul eavesdropped outrageously, a hand behind his ear. At intervals he would look back at Ganelon with a bright smile as if to say, Yes, this is daily life, isn't it?

When the women fell silent and the prince began eyeing the candy and soft-drink machines, Ganelon decided to protect his money by suggesting a stroll around the corner to the quai. They were caliph and vizier, after all, and new refrigerators for old had an Arabian Nights air.

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On the way Ganelon remarked, "But let's rule out anything in the Aladdin line like an old refrigerator with a genie in furs and mittens inside ready to grant any wish provided it involves frozen food." When Ganelon added a smile, the blinking prince saw it was a joke and laughed gaily.

They turned the corner onto the quai and found the block crowded with people and old refrigerators. To speed things along, a committee of the stronger residents were carrying down the old refrigerators now. Tomorrow they intended to help carry up the new refrigerators, too. Some machines stood throbbing at the curb powered by extension cords run out through the second-floor windows. Other owners were giving away food from their thawing machines. Bottles of wine and glasses had appeared and the whole block had taken on a busy carnival air.

"Drat!" said the prince. "There goes my best idea. This little old lady is out shopping, you see, and stumbles onto an exchange of microfilm between two members of an espionage apparatus. Little does she know her package of frozen petit pois contains the plans for the ultra-secret nuclear death-ray. Desperate, the spies follow her back to the quai, et cetera, et cetera."

"I'm shot down, too," admitted Ganelon. "I asked myself why a refrigerator and decided it was because it would take two men to get it up the stairs and into an apartment. I was thinking of the meeting of the leaders of a rival gang, or a man on a hit list, or a miser with a priceless collection of jade. But this throws everything out the window."

"Suppose someone's hiding in the refrigerator," asked the prince. "When the apartment's asleep, he emerges and does some dirty deed."

Ganelon shook his head. "No one gets a new refrigerator without looking inside." He spoke absently, for he was more interested in hearing what the residents had to say about new refrigerators for old. The consensus seemed to be that it was a publicity stunt.

But a dreamy-eyed woman with a meager pyramid of curls atop her large head believed otherwise. "This rich American millionaire is after my little Queen of the Alps, the prettiest little refrigerator in the world," she insisted. "An oldy but goody, and maybe mine's the only one left in captivity. He collects refrigerators, this millionaire. He's got one of every kind, except for a Queen of the Alps. So he sends agents all over the world, peeking into respectable people's windows. At last he finds mine on the Quai des Matelots. But Mr.

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American Millionaire is afraid to make me an offer for it. What if I squeeze him dry? So he devises his grand scheme. Well, so be it. Let no one say I stood in the way of my neighbors getting new refrigerators." The people about her muttered and walked away.

But Ganelon stepped forward with a sudden thought. "An interesting idea, lady," he said in a counterfeit voice. "But tell me something: is there anyone who isn't going to trade?"

"Some who would, can't, poor souls," said the woman. "These new wider models won't go up all the stairs. And we have the clumsy ones like Mr. Andre there." She nodded toward the brawny young man in shirt sleeves sitting on the curb crying wetly into his hands. The woman explained that Andre and his brothers-in-law had gotten his old refrigerator stuck on a turning on the stairs on the way down. The machine seemed wedged in permanently.

Ganelon's attention was drawn from the crying man to a bow-legged, underslung, and faded old woman with a scowl, picking her way around the refrigerators and extension cords. She strode along, carrying a black-oilcloth shopping bag from which protruded a loaf of bread and the top of a bunch of celery. "Hardly the look of a woman who's about to get a new major appliance," observed the detective.

The Queen of the Alps owner laughed. "That's Madame Rosalie, the piano teacher, heading home in time for her seven o'clock class. Oh, she'll get her refrigerator, all right. But she wanted two. That's her house there standing by itself at the top of the street. She rents out her fourth-floor front furnished and wanted to trade in that refrigerator, too. But her tenant won't let anyone into the apartment for any reason."

When Ganelon made a disapproving noise, the woman nodded. "They say this Captain Maurice rented Madame Rosalie's apartment because it looks out to sea. Though he's no seafaring man. An indoor face if I ever saw one. I was there the day he arrived. Legless from the knees down, the poor old fellow. The taxi driver lifted him out of the car like a baby and carried him up to the apartment, and then his luggage and the wheelchair. That very same day a locksmith fitted the apartment door with a heavy bolt and a fat chain. No one's ever seen the man since, or the inside of the apartment. Even the grocery boy leaves everything outside the door."

Madame Rosalie's narrow, five-story house stood alone at the very end of the block where the rue Nicholas intersected the quai, an

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abutting building having been demolished some years before. The dusty shop of a dealer in nautical prints occupied the first floor. In the evening gloom, Ganelon and the prince couldn't see much more of the fourth floor than the flutter of curtains at the two large windows.

Next to the print-shop window was a doorway marked with two plaques: *The San Sebastiano Society for the Deaf* and *Madame Rosalie Paquin. Piano Given.*

The sound of young, unwilling fingers misusing a grand piano tumbled down upon their heads as Ganelon led the way up the narrow staircase. Beyond the second-floor offices of the Society for the Deaf where the staircase took a particularly sharp turn, Ganelon looked back over his shoulder and said, "There's Captain Maurice's hold over his landlady. Tenants who'd take this kind of racket don't grow on trees." They passed the third-floor studio, where a metronome beat out its elusive time and the piano stumbled after it. They mounted to the fourth floor. Ganelon glanced up the final staircase to Madame Rosalie's apartment and then knocked on Captain Maurice's door.

It was several moments before there was any sound. Then Ganelon heard the action of a shotgun behind the door. A careful voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Ambrose Ganelon," answered the detective. "His Highness Prince Raoul and I are here to help you."

Ganelon's most recognizable feature was his voice, the result of *The Ganelon Hour,* the popular weekly radio show on which he read accounts of the adventures of his three predecessors to support the upkeep of the Ganeloniana Wing of the Biblioteque du Prince.

The Ganelon Hour did the trick. Locks clattered, bolts pulled back, and the door opened on a chain. The double muzzle of a shotgun and the eye of a seated man appeared on the crack of the door. Ganelon was ready with a hundred-franc coin to hand through so the man could compare it with the profile Prince Raoul dutifully displayed for him.

"Inside!" urged Captain Maurice, taking the door off its chain and locking it again right behind them.

Madame Rosalie's taste in furniture ran to the bowlegged, underslung, and faded. A chalk mark wavered across the floor three feet in front of the open windows, drawn by the man, Ganelon had no doubt, to warn himself not to get close enough to be seen from the street.

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Captain Maurice was a balding man with white feathers of hair about his ears. His eyes wore a hunted expression and his fingers plucked nervously at the shotgun barrel. He offered them the sofa and shook his head with bewilderment. "I can't understand what Grotz is up to," he said. "He knows I'm not going to let any damned refrigerator through that door."

"Why not tell us about it?" suggested the Prince.

The man looked at them bleakly. Then he slapped his upper legs. "I lost the rest of these crewing an Imperial Airlines flying boat on the Brindisi-Alexandria run in 1936. I was the youngest co-pilot in the air at the time. Some say Mussolini's people tampered with the controls.

"So there I was with a small pension and a lump sum by way of compensation, a young man who considered flying his life. Well, I remembered this story about the bird of paradise. They used to think the damn thing hadn't any legs, either. They thought the bird of paradise had to fly from the time it hatched until it died, feeding on the colors of the sunrise and sunset and drinking nectar on the wing from the topmost tree blossoms. A short life but a happy one, that was good enough for me!"

He smiled, remembering himself as a young man. Then he told them how he bought a Prentiss-Jenkins Hedgehog bi-wing two-seater fitted out with manual controls and sailed with it to Borneo where adventures were to be had and fortunes to be made in opals. In this rough-and-tumble, a legless man needed a partner. Enter Grotz, a brooding little dandy of a man whose bad luck had hounded him around the world and run him to ground in one of the corrugated-metal mining towns in the jungle. The peacock and the bird of paradise, that was how Maurice described their partnership of close scraps and tight corners. After five years they'd parlayed a small bankroll, a lot of hard work, and a little larceny into a leather pouch containing a king's ransom in opals. When Loo Choy and his cutthroats came bucking out through the weeds to the torchlit runway in that tin-lizzie of theirs, guns ablaze, Maurice and Grotz were already airborne up into the darkness.

Maurice was staring ahead of him into the night, imagining a whole king's ransom for himself when the Hedgehog sputtered and stalled. Grotz, his bad luck written all over his face, slapped him on the shoulder and shouted, "What's wrong?" As the wind whistled around them, Maurice shouted back over his shoulder, "They hit the gas tank. We'll have to jump. You go first. I'll keep her nose up!"

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So Grotz parachuted down into a jungle the luckiest man in the world couldn't walk out of. And Maurice switched to the auxiliary tank and flew away.

Maurice used the opals to start Bird of Paradise Air Freight. But into its second year of operation, the Japanese occupied Borneo and he fled to Australia with the shirt on his back and his second best wheelchair on the last plane out. He was with Australian air intelligence during the war. Then he came back home and for twenty years shuffled papers behind a desk for Air San Sebastiano.

"But Grotz hadn't died in the jungle," said Ganelon.

Captain Maurice gave his head a grim shake. Grotz had stumbled onto a mission hospital in the jungle. He lay near death for months. The first day he was up and around, the Japanese marched in and interned everyone.

Now Grotz had heard the Hedgehog's motor start up as he floated down and knew he'd been betrayed. He burned to avenge himself, but it wasn't until 1944, just two weeks before the camp was liberated, that he escaped. After six months in the jungle he was captured by a tribe of headhunters. He cowed them with some sleight-of-hand from card-sharping days and they made him their chief and taught him their ways, including their custom of sacrificing their chief during eclipses of the sun.

Ten years later, Grotz fled in the daylight darkness, and though wounded by blowgun darts reached a plantation doorstep before he collapsed. When he came to weeks later, his memory was blank. The Dutch plantation-owner liked Grotz and offered him work. Five years later he married the man's only child, a beautiful woman who bore him several wonderful children. But on their fifth wedding anniversary, Grotz's wife presented him with opal cufflinks and his memory came rushing back. On the spot, the man's only object in life was to kill Maurice.

"And how do you know all this?" interrupted Ganelon.

"His first call came from Singapore," said Maurice. "He guessed that if I was still alive I'd be back in San Sebastiano. The operator found me in the book. Before he hung up, Grotz told me he was going to rob the bank next door to finance his revenge."

But Maurice wasn't to hear from him for another seven years, which was the sentence he was given for attempting to rob a bank while thirty armed police cadets from the academy around the corner were cashing their paychecks. The next call came from Burma, where Grotz had gone to prospect for rubies to bankroll Maurice's

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death. Maurice was apprehensive but not particularly worried for he was counting on Grotz's bad luck. And the man did leave Burma penniless. But while he was there, his father-in-law, his wife, and his children were killed when fire swept their plantation home. Grotz inherited everything.

"Well, a legless man can't run very far," said Maurice, "and I couldn't hide for long. So I decided to make a stand. What I needed was a place with a little sky for an old bird-of-paradise aviator to nibble on and only one way in."

He patted the shotgun. "Well, he found me fast enough. Yesterday he called. He asked me what I could see from my window, and when I told him I could tell he was nodding and that he was seeing the same sky. He's here. Cocksure and determined. I expected something better than this refrigerator business."

"No police?" asked Ganelon.

"It's between the two of us," said Maurice. "I'm the guilty party, after all. Such terrible, terrible luck. Why did he have to get his memory back?"

They were out on the street on their way to rescue the royal napkins from the wash when Ganelon remembered he hadn't gotten back the hundred-franc piece he'd given Maurice to compare with Prince Raoul's profile.

At nine forty-five the next morning, as they had arranged with the besieged man, Ganelon and Prince Raoul, both in simple sunglass disguises, returned to the cool breezes of the Quai des Matelots. The street was busy and expectant as they strode along in the direction of the rue Nicholas.

"All right," the Prince was saying, "so the stairs are too narrow for the damned refrigerator. Doesn't that just mean Captain Maurice is safe and Madame Rosalie is out of luck? What does a grand piano have to do with anything?"

Madame Rosalie was already standing at the curb, looking nervously down the quai toward the rue Rivarol. As the last one on the block, she was more anxious than anyone to see the truck arrive. As they passed behind her, Ganelon stopped to look up under the roof where the roof tree beam extended out from under the eaves. Then he smiled and went inside. Raoul followed after him up the stairs muttering. "As your prince, I could order you to tell me what's going on," he threatened.

"They couldn't have gotten a grand piano up these stairs, either.

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But it's up there," said Ganelon. "They hoisted the piano up from the outside. You can be damned sure that's the way the refrigerator will come." Then he raised his hand for silence. On the second-floor landing outside the Society for the Deaf a well dressed old gentleman with gloves and cane stood leaning against the wall as though waiting for someone. As Ganelon and the prince passed, a woman with a hearing-aid emerged from the office leading a small fretting child by the hand. The old man winked at the child and then reached down and to her wide-eyed amazement, pulled a fifty-centime piece from her ear and handed it to her. The prince laughed but Ganelon did not. They continued on their way up the stairs.

The prearranged knock got them into Captain Maurice's apartment again. The clock read five to ten.

Maurice sat for a moment without speaking, rocking back and forth in his wheelchair. Ganelon decided it was the old man's equivalent of pacing.

"I've been hashing it over about Grotz and myself all night," Maurice said with a decisive shake of his head. "The guy should thank me. I mean really. I'm the only thing that pulled him through the jungle, the Japs, the headhunters, all of it. He wanted to kill me that bad." His voice turned cheery. "So maybe we're even, right?"

But they were not and Maurice knew it. He hid his face in his hands. "Damn," he said through his fingers, "it's hard to find a friend and lose him in the same second. Standing there on the wing of the Hedgehog ready to jump, he looked back over his shoulder. 'What about you?' he shouted. 'I'll be right behind you!' I shouted. 'Jump! I'm okay!' And he jumped."

"New refrigerators for old," came the bullhorn. Ganelon crossed to the window. The truck had returned at the promised hour. But it had approached the quai from the other direction, stopping first at the curb where the delighted Madame Rosalie stood.

"So it's started then," said Captain Maurice. "So be it. But I'd sure feel a lot better if I knew what 'it' was."

As Ganelon watched, two large men jumped from the back of the truck with a rope net and the components of a block and tackle and followed the music teacher into the building. Behind him, Ganelon could hear the prince explain to Maurice the various ideas they had rejected and the process of reasoning that had led Ganelon to the conclusion that Grotz would come up the outside of the building in the refrigerator. Then many footsteps passed outside the door and pounded upstairs to Madame Rosalie's apartment.

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"I might add in conclusion," smiled the prince, "that we never even briefly considered the possibility that one of the old refrigerators might harbor a genii in mittens and a muffler who'd grant wishes provided they involved frozen food."

Ganelon turned from the window to give the prince a thoughtful look.

Maurice patted his shotgun. "Well, then I have him, right? Kill or be killed, right? And with the prince himself and Mr. Ganelon here to testify it was self-defense, right?" The man wheeled around and took up a defensive position behind a sofa rampart, setting his gun at the ready.

Ganelon leaned back against the wall between the two windows and watched with crossed arms. Overhead an old refrigerator was being moved across the ceiling to the window. Then a rope went uncoiling past the window on his left down to the man with the bullhorn.

"Blam! Blam!" rehearsed Maurice. "Gotcha!" Then he ordered the prince out of the line of fire. After a moment he wheeled out from behind the sofa and began pushing furniture close to the wall to give himself a clearer shot at the window.

"It's the waiting that gets you," he said. "You've got to keep busy." As he started back, the phone on the end-table rang. "There's Grotz," said Maurice with a decisive nod. "I know my man. A word or two before he slips in the knife. Well, this time he's in for a surprise."

As the bottom of Madame Rosalie's old refrigerator appeared at the top of the window, the man in the wheelchair started past the telephone to take up his position behind the sofa. Then he stopped and looked at the ringing telephone. "But it's not going to be that easy. I'm the one who did him wrong, remember?" He considered this for a moment. Then he said, "Suppose I tell him flat out that I know what he's up to. Suppose instead of killing him in self-defense, I warn him off, tell him I know he's going to come up in the new refrigerator. I'd be giving back the same life I took from him so long ago."

Captain Maurice liked the idea. He lay the shotgun across his knees and reached for the phone. "Hello?" he said. But there was no answer at the other end of the line. "Hello?" he said again.

Ganelon watched and waited. At this point, the old refrigerator was filling the window. It stopped in its downward progress, spinning around gently in its rope net. As Captain Maurice stared into the mouthpiece of the receiver with a perplexed look on his face, the

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refrigerator door opened as much as the rope net would allow and the end of a tube protruded from the crack. Yes, thought Ganelon, the Borneo headhunters had taught Grotz their blowgun ways. And like a true sleight-of-hand artist, Grotz would have arranged things to have his audience watching the wrong refrigerator. Reaching over, the detective slammed the refrigerator door shut on the tube.

When they arrived at the blue door in the palace wall, Prince Raoul turned and shook Ganelon's hand. "Thou hast done wisely, as always, O faithful Vizier," he said. "And you negotiated the reconciliation like a seasoned diplomat. A touching scene."

"Until our next adventure, O mighty Caliph," said Ganelon, struggling to ignore the aroma of Princess Dixie's Texas pot roast (the detective's favorite) wafting over the wall.

As the door closed behind the prince, Ganelon rattled the few coins remaining in his pocket and sighed. Then he started back toward the rue Blondin, where he would transform himself into Benoit, the failed middleweight pug whose broken nose had become a dinner-hour fixture in the soup line at the Abbey of the Holy Vernicle.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

LA MORT DE LA TANTE

by BETTY JOCHMANS

They tried hard to kill rich Aunt May
And finally did it one day.
Now her nephews and nieces
Are richer than Croesus,
Proving where there's a will there's a way.

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DETECTIVERSE

PENETRATING OBSERVATION

by MARK GRENIER

"I find," said a cracksman named Loring,
"That drilling a safe sets me snoring.
Though loot from the drilling
Is always quite thrilling,
The drilling itself is just boring."

"Q"

PACKING HER OFF

by MARK GRENIER

Said a package dispatcher named Thatcher,
"My unfaithful young wife, when I catch her,
I shall package with care,
But without any air,
For it's thus that I plan to dispatch her."

"Q"

SCENE OF THE CRIME

by MARK GRENIER

'Twas a play about murder and guilt.
When he stabbed her 'twas real blood he spilt.
Now she lies in her grave,
But the critics still rave
That she played her last role to the hilt.

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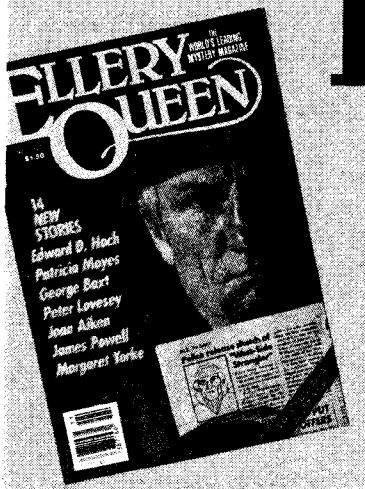

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♥Q

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The long white ambulance backed out of the driveway and cruised quietly off toward the morgue. No flashing lights, no siren—no need for them. Whoever wanted Jim Hayward dead had him where they wanted him . . .

FRAME FOURTEEN

by GERALD TOMLINSON

I drove over to Monroe Street on a rainy Tuesday night to see Jim Hayward, intending to ask him a couple of questions about a new zoom lens I had begun to carry in the store. No one knew more about zoom lenses than Jim.

What I saw when I got there was not my old friend Jim, but his plastic-bagged body being wheeled out in the downpour, a white police car with red and blue lights flashing, a gleaming white ambulance, and Jim's blonde widow Inga standing by, soaked and stricken, framed by the late-evening blackness.

It's hard not to feel sorry for an attractive, distraught widow. We'd had our arguments over the years, including one more or less final argument, but I figured this was no time to maintain a feud. I walked over to her. She looked up with a faint nod of recognition.

"What happened?" I asked.

"He was murdered."

"Here?"

She turned her head, showing her striking profile, still gorgeous after all these years. "Back there. A bullet through the kitchen window. There's glass all over."

"One shot?"

"Two. The first one hit his shoulder. The second—"

I said, "I'm sorry." There was another question I wanted to ask her. It was a more important one, and although it opened up old wounds I went ahead and asked it. "Was Jim on a police assignment?"

Her shoulders sagged slightly, but on the whole she showed less

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emotion than I had expected. "I don't know, Stan. He may have been. He said something about drugs, but I wasn't listening."

Early that morning Jim had picked up three rolls of Tri-X film at the store and told me he was going up to Ellensburg. Black-and-white film usually meant a police assignment.

"Did he say anything about going to Ellensburg?"

"No."

"I'm pretty sure he went there, but I don't know why. At about four this afternoon he brought some film in for processing. He seemed upset."

With that, she turned away, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief.

Inga Hayward and I had been on less than friendly terms for many years, ever since Jim took up police photography. She blamed me for getting him the job. It was an unfair charge—I didn't really get it for him; I only recommended him. But that's how she saw things, and she disliked me for it. She thought the work was too dangerous. She said Jim was too gentle, too defenseless for police work. He wasn't, in fact, but wives are presumed to know best about such matters.

So it didn't surprise me, especially under these circumstances, to see her cut short the conversation. With Jim lying dead, and a police assignment the possible cause, I could hardly have been the most welcome mourner on the scene.

As I walked back toward my Plymouth, the long white ambulance backed out of the driveway and cruised quietly off toward the morgue. No flashing lights, no siren—no need for them. Whoever wanted Jim dead had him where they wanted him.

But who would want him dead? And why?

Jim was one of the nicer guys in town. I had known him since the two of us were kids at Elm City High School. Our class didn't vote him Most Likely To Succeed, a kind of error that I suppose is common among high-school prophets. The boy we voted for was killed in action in Korea while Jim went to college, came home, and gradually became famous. Not Johnny Carson famous, but think photography and you may be able to place him.

After high school Jim became a superb photographer—and I don't mean a Sunday snapshooter. From the first, he specialized in nature photography, especially birds. Over the years he became a top pro. If you've ever seen a spectacular color photo of a kingfisher or a

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screech owl, a bobolink or an osprey, chances are you've seen Jim Hayward's work.

Five of his best pictures, 16x20 dye-transfer enlargements, are on the walls of my store, Stan's Photo, in downtown Elm City. Jim autographed them for me—five big signatures done with a felt-tip pen.

Rain bathed the windshield of the Plymouth as I drove home. I live in a studio apartment on the north side. My wife left me three years ago to take up with an evangelist. No fire and brimstone descended on any of the parties involved, and I have to admit I don't miss her much.

My thoughts turned to Inga.

Jim met Inga at an Elm City Camera Club shooting session about eighteen years ago. She earned good money as a buyer for a small department store in those days, and she also did part-time modeling, some for the store, some on her own. She was very attractive and quite uninhibited.

Jim met her the first year he joined the club. I'd met her the year before. Jim, despite his good nature, was no joiner. He had to be talked into visiting the club, but once he started coming he took a liking to it.

Maybe that liking was just to Inga, because, to my surprise, Jim and Inga fell in love. You never know. It seemed to me like the lamb lying down with the lion. Anyway, the romance led to marriage within six months. That was too soon, I told him, realizing that my mistrust would probably get back to Inga. From club gossip I knew she had been more than a model to at least one of our mutual acquaintances, Roger Valentine, an Elm City lawyer.

But Jim would have none of it. He loved her and he was a born idealist. Like the women who expect to reform lovable drunks, Jim thought he could mend the ways of the lovely, if fickle, Inga.

Maybe he did for a while. She certainly never made a pass at me or anyone I knew during the first three years of their marriage. The incident that ended our mutual tolerance, Inga's and mine, was triggered by a chance conversation.

Peter Flood, the Elm City Chief of Police, brought some Christmas snapshots to my shop for processing. We talked a bit. It seemed he was unhappy with the cop on the force who had been taking police photos. The guy had fouled up a couple of times. I don't remember the details, but I do remember what I suggested. "Chief," I said, "you should talk to Jim Hayward. He's a freelance photographer.

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Birds mostly, but he's the best photographer in town, one of the best in the state. He's got enough telephoto lenses to put half the population of Elm City in jail if he starts aiming them at bedrooms instead of bluejays."

Flood talked to Jim before the day was out. And before Inga could object, Jim had accepted the chief's offer of freelance police work. He had a new category of photographic subjects, the class *Criminalis* to add to the class *Aves*.

Naturally, he did a great job. Jim worked only on special assignments, most of them requiring the long 200- to 400-mm telephotos, those costly black-tube lenses of his that could take head-and-shoulders portraits of hummingbirds at half a mile.

He seldom talked to me about his police work. Inga never talked to me about it, or anything else. She was furious. She blamed me for putting his life in jeopardy, for making him a likely target of thieves and killers. Phooey. Or so I thought when she first said it.

I parked under a streetlight and dashed through the rain to my apartment. I was on the ground floor of a new three-story building with walls like pasteboard, ceilings like papier-mâché, and halls like echo chambers. I heard the phone ringing before I reached the door. Usually the noise stops just as my hand touches the receiver, but this time the caller showed patience and was rewarded for it.

"Yes?"

"Hello, Stan." The voice belonged to Roger Valentine. Nowadays he was Judge Roger Valentine. "Have you heard?"

"I heard. In fact, I saw."

"The news was on the radio a few minutes ago. I phoned Inga right away. She's in a bad way."

The judge himself sounded more upset than Inga. "Really?" I said. "I thought she took it fine."

I heard ice cubes clinking in a glass. He said, "She was probably putting on a front. The image. It had to be a terrible experience for her. When I called, she was crying."

"I'm sorry. But you know how it's been with us, Roger."

"I know. I understand. And I always thought she was a little unfair. But, listen, you told her Jim came up to Ellensburg this morning."

"Uh-huh."

"Are you sure about that?"

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I looked into the receiver, puzzled. "That's where he said he was going."

"Well," Valentine agreed reluctantly, "it could be. It's strange I didn't see him. There's nothing much here in Ellensburg except me. I wonder why he didn't stop in to say hello. I was here all day."

Ellensburg, true enough, was tiny. It had fewer than six hundred people. Roger Valentine's mansion is there, along with the regional high school, a general store, and a gas station. That's about it.

He pursued the inquiry. "What was he up here for, do you know? Red-tailed hawks?"

"He didn't say."

"We've got a lot of them on the hill this year. That was probably it, red-tailed hawks." He sounded dubious. "The rain didn't start until after three o'clock, so he had time to take some photos."

"I guess so."

"You told Inga he bought some film from you this morning."

Valentine had been Tionega County District Attorney for one term and maybe he couldn't shake his old ways. "That's right."

"He didn't take any film home, so I suppose he left it with you for developing."

Now, I don't consider myself suspicious or especially irritable, but this conversation was getting to me. Jim Hayward had taken some pictures of red-tailed hawks, or so Roger Valentine said he thought, and now here was Roger tracking them down as if those pictures were the key to the murder.

My instinct was to press him for details. Did he know something I didn't? But I've never been much good at that, never been aggressive in conversation. So I said, "Sure. He left the film for processing."

"Um."

Roger talked for another couple of minutes, sounding preoccupied. Then he said, "Well, good night, Stan. Let's hope the police can clear this up. Jim Hayward was a fine man. You'll be at the funeral?"

"Yes."

That was it. We hung up.

Ellensburg. Roger Valentine. Forty-eight-year-old pillar of the community. He was Justice of the Supreme Court of the Sixth Judicial District of the State of New York. A ponderous title for a man of wealth and substance.

Twice divorced, he lived on an estate on the outskirts of Ellensburg. "A lonely hermit in a mountain fastness," he'd once said. Well,

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I don't think he was ever a lonely hermit. He often had young women on his arm in Elm City, and I couldn't help thinking that perhaps he and Inga had renewed old acquaintances. It was a possibility. But even if they had, the judge was about the least likely murder suspect around. He was just too loftily respectable to be skulking about with firearms on a dark, rainy night.

Roger Valentine had inherited the bulk of a lumber fortune from his father. Over the years he had exchanged some of the estate for a Harvard law degree, some for a fling in state politics, and a great deal more for the costly classic cars to which he was addicted. In addition to his auto collection—the Zagatas, the Delages, the Duesenbergs, the Hispano-Suizas—he had quite an assortment of cameras, although he lacked Jim's professional interest or my commercial interest in photography. But although he regarded photography as a corollary to owning expensive cars, taking pictures of nothing but automobiles, he was a long-time member of the Elm City Camera Club.

I decided I needed a drink. More to the point, I needed a drink at Appleby's Bar, the downtown oasis where Elm City's grizzled police chief Peter Flood could usually be found bending an elbow in his off hours. At headquarters Flood was all business, but at Appleby's the ebullience flowed with the spirits.

The rain poured down, unrelenting, showing signs of lasting all night. Appleby's came into view, its windows bright with the neon of competing breweries. I braked, turned off the ignition, jumped from the Plymouth, slammed the driver's door, and cursed as I splashed my way to the entrance. Inside, I shook myself like a disgruntled dog and looked around.

Sure enough, Elm City's police chief was there, a tall and hefty presence halfway down the bar. He was watching a TV sitcom on the big screen above the bottles and the mirror, but I doubted he was giving it his full attention. When I approached, he turned toward me in the stolid but commanding way veteran police officers seem to acquire.

"Hello, Stan," he said. "Too bad about Jim Hayward. I know you and him were friends."

"Yeah." I ordered a beer and tipped it back, leveling the foam. "Terrible."

He said, "Keeler's on the case."

"Good." Keeler had solved a tough, all-but-clueless murder case

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last year. I tried out my hunch on Flood. "Jim was working for *you*, right? For the department?"

Flood looked miffed. "He told you, did he?"

I smiled thinly. "No. But I hope you will."

He stared out from under his tangled eyebrows for a while, then made a motion with his glass that directed me toward a booth across from the bar. I followed with my beer.

"The sheriff and I set it up," he said when we were seated. "A joint operation. Nothing very important—just Lew Kurtz, a two-bit drug dealer on his weekly trip to Ellensburg. We've been after him for weeks and finally decided to get some pictures of him at work. Ellensburg was the best spot for it. We had Jim stationed up the hill, not far from Judge Valentine's house, with his camera pointed down toward the front of Mueller's store. That's where Kurtz does his business. One of the sheriff's men was the buyer. All Jim had to do was snap a few pictures when the stuff changed hands."

"Did he?"

"As far as I know he did. Everything on the street went okay. We didn't see Jim afterward, but that's not unusual. He does his developing in the darkroom at the back of your shop, doesn't he?"

"Yeah. He brought in a roll of color and a roll of black-and-white at about four o'clock. The color film goes to Kodak—Jim never did his own color processing. He said he'd come in and develop the black-and-white after dinner. He seemed bothered about something, but he didn't say what."

Flood looked thoughtful. "He was a quiet one. A good listener, not much of a talker. You know, Stan, I think you better go back there and develop the film tonight. I mean, Lew Kurtz is in jail, and he didn't know Jim was up there on the hill—I don't think there's any connection, but if there is I don't want to look like I'm dragging my feet."

I agreed. Raising my glass, I finished the beer and left.

Stan's Photo is only two blocks away from Appleby's, so I braved the rain on foot. It hadn't let up.

Rain or shine, downtown Elm City is an unpromising subject for a picture postcard. Once prosperous but never very scenic, it has been ravaged by urban renewal in recent years. Parking garages and cellblock-type government buildings are the dominant motif. Private enterprise has contributed a grotesque towering bank building in the neo-Moorish style. The new Elm City, only partially com-

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plete, has risen from the ruins of Kresge's and Grant's and little mom-and-pop businesses that couldn't survive the invading national chains and the two out-of-town shopping malls. But Stan's Photo still flourishes, sometimes only barely, a lonely survivor flanked by a parking lot and the state unemployment office.

As I passed the Friendly Finance Company and came into sight of my front door, I could see right away that something was wrong. The big pane of glass had been shattered and the door stood ajar.

I stopped short, surprised. Worried and wet, my natural curiosity lost out to my ingrained caution. Turning back, I plunged into the phonebooth at the corner of State and Clarkson Streets and called Peter Flood at Appleby's. Against the background noise of the tavern's revelers, he told me to sit tight until help came. I did, while rain splattered loudly off the metal roof of the old-fashioned kiosk.

From the phonebooth I had a distant view of the smashed front window of my store. There was no activity that I could see, and the street itself was deserted, except for a soaked derelict who stumbled by, paused for a moment to study the slivered glass, then shuffled on. He needed soup more than he needed a single-lens reflex.

Help soon arrived in the form of two police cars and four officers. No flashing lights or sirens, which I thought made sense. I joined them and filled them in on the situation. A few moments later Captain Flood strode up, fully drenched to match his name, but remarkably cheerful. He directed operations. They found the store empty and I followed them in.

A hasty glance around showed what had been stolen—Jim Hayward's color film. The countertop tray at the front of the store held film on its way to a local color-finishing lab or to the Kodak lab in Rochester. The envelopes in this tray had been scattered on the floor, and Hayward's color film was missing. That was all. Just Jim's exposed roll of color. So far, so good. The color roll contained nothing but pictures of birds, of that I was quite sure. It was always color for birds, black-and-white for police work.

The tray held no black-and-white film—and therefore no police photos. I personally processed black-and-white in my own darkroom on the premises—except for Jim Hayward's. Because his police assignments were confidential, he had arranged to use my darkroom to develop the police film himself.

The darkroom was in the rear of the store. It was locked and undisturbed. The intruder probably didn't know about it. Even if he did, he might have thought the color film was what he needed. In

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any case, Jim's 35-mm roll of Tri-X lay on a shelf above the sink, undeveloped. I showed it to Flood.

He nodded. "Develop it, Stan. How long'll it take?"

"Twenty minutes. You want to wait?"

"You bet."

He and the other four officers left the darkroom and I started to work, loading the film into the developing tank in total darkness with practiced speed. Then, with the lights back on, I poured in fine-grain developer. I didn't know whether Jim ever bothered with fine-grain, since it took a little longer, but I figured we might need some big blowups of this particular roll.

The minutes ticked slowly away. I fidgeted, itching to see what Jim had captured on film, to find out what could have led so suddenly and directly to his murder. Not a small-time drug operation, I thought.

I poured out the developer and poured in the shortstop bath, then waited some more, the silence oppressive and absolute. After I discarded the shortstop, I had to restrain my eagerness for a few minutes until the fixer solution did its work. Otherwise the images would appear but then fade away.

When it was safe to uncap the tank, I took a look. My hands shook slightly. I felt I would find something important, something out of the ordinary.

I did.

The seventh through fourteenth frames were basically the same. They had nothing to do with a drug transaction. The camera was aimed at the back of Roger Valentine's house. The pictures showed a window, and through the window three figures were visible. They were standing, apparently talking to each other. Enlargements were needed to show who the people were.

I made enlargements.

When they were spread out on the counter, wet and glistening, they told Peter Flood everything he needed to know. He brought his fist down on the counter in evident satisfaction.

I wasn't quite as enlightened, although I could see that frame fourteen showed the judge with a stunned expression looking straight up the hill toward the camera.

Jim Hayward had obviously been seen.

I said, "Okay, Chief. There's Roger Valentine and Inga Hayward. But who's the third person, the big guy with the bald spot on top?"

"You don't have a good memory for faces, do you, Stan?"

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"As a matter of fact, no."

"As a matter of fact, if you did, you'd recognize him from the newspapers of ten or twelve years ago. He's David Manwaring, a hired killer. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by Judge Valentine way back then. He was just recently paroled from Attica."

Then I saw it. The judge and Mrs. Hayward were lovers. That was no great surprise. They wanted to get rid of Jim. Understandable, though drastic. But neither the judge nor Inga was going to do it personally. No indeed. Not when David Manwaring, experienced in such affairs, was back in town.

Something had made Jim shift his focus from Mueller's store to Judge Valentine's house—something he'd heard or seen or divined. As Flood said, he was a good listener. And in his quiet way he had gotten the goods on his wife and Valentine. But his frame fourteen was going to change their timetable a little.

"Q"

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Eddie was desperately in need of a doctor's attention. But every medical facility for miles around was sure to be waiting for him, and if that cashier was dead . . .

EDDIE'S LUCK

by CHARLES R. McCONNELL

Lucky Eddie Hatch was hurting. Badly. The bullet was small, perhaps a .25 or even a .22, but it was somewhere deep within him and he recalled with painful clarity everything he'd ever heard about the horrors of being gut-shot.

Unable to separate physical pain from the pain induced by the fear he couldn't set aside, Eddie leaned against the sheltered side of a concrete pillar near the Park-and-Ride bus stop and gazed longingly at the public drinking fountain twenty feet away. His thickening tongue and dry throat cried out for cool liquid, but he knew enough about belly wounds to know that a drink would only hasten the damage and elevate his pain to new heights.

The downtown skyline loomed a mile to his left. Between the mixed commercial and residential district where he waited and the buildings of downtown stood University Hospital. Eight floors high and a block wide, the rose-colored structure was a warm friendly face in contrast to the scowling concrete behind it. Eddie wished he was there with the best of doctors and equipment and the latest techniques.

But every medical facility for miles around was sure to be watching for him, and if that cashier was dead—

Eddie Hatch could have had his choice of partners but he stuck with Angelo. Everybody wanted to work with Lucky Eddie. Good planning, good execution, and always good breaks.

Until today.

People weren't supposed to act the way the cashier did. Once in a while, perhaps—some crusty codger who'd put his life on the line rather than take any guff from anyone—but most people were scared

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and cooperative. Eddie never expected a timid-looking cashier confronted by two stocking-masked gunmen to reach calmly into his cash drawer and come up with a small automatic blazing away.

Angelo was hit in the forehead and dropped in his tracks. Eddie was hit in the belly as he squeezed twice and blew the cashier off his stool and out of sight.

Then he got lucky, if he could call it lucky after being shot. He got past a few stunned bystanders, ditched his mask in an alley, and a block away scrambled unseen into the back of a laundry truck. Fifteen minutes later he slipped from the truck as it jockeyed for a parking space—carrying a thin bundle of small towels.

In a stall in a public restroom he folded one towel into a compress. He wrapped other towels around his middle in a crude overlapping sash and zipped his windbreaker over his damaged shirt. There hadn't been much blood, at least not showing.

But he knew he was bleeding inside. How much he had no idea, but the little slug could have busted open parts that would seep blood and eventually—how soon?—fill his abdominal cavity. Already he felt burning in his chest, and cramps were beginning. His tolerance for pain had carried him so far, but how long could he hold out? He knew he needed medical help. He needed another lucky break.

He wished the bus would hurry. He'd had to abandon their original plan and forget about the stolen car stashed downtown. His own car was at the suburban motel where he and Angelo had registered under false names. The bus would take him in the right direction but he would still have several miles to go.

At last the bus arrived. Head down, Eddie shuffled aboard at the end of a thin line of shoppers and business people. He dropped his coins in the box and found a seat behind two tall men so he couldn't be seen from the front of the bus.

"That was a hell of a job you did in surgery this afternoon," the man in the aisle seat was saying to his companion as Eddie seated himself. "You're going to hear about that operation from all over the country."

Eddie perked up.

"It was tough," acknowledged the other broad-shouldered, silver-haired man. "Especially with the visiting muckymucks looking on. As many times as I've done it I still tense up, especially when Dr. Foley's peering over my shoulder."

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"Foley?"

The big man nodded. "Peter Foley. He coached me in some of the special techniques when I was new. Still looks in on me once in a while. A fine gentleman, but a real perfectionist."

The man on the aisle said, "He taught you well. You were great. A lot of people are going to remember you as the surgeon who saved their favorite civic-minded millionaire today. Big day for you, Doc."

"Come on, forget the Doc stuff. Until I put on my whites again tomorrow morning I'm just Jim Harrigan. The only way I can do what I do every day is to forget about it every night."

Doctors—or at least the big man was! Eddie fingered the loaded .32 in his jacket pocket and wondered how he could get the doctor to help him. His forehead felt moist and sitting made his pain worse.

Ten minutes later the bus pulled into the parking lot of a shopping center. The remaining five passengers, including Eddie and the two men, left their seats and filed from the bus.

The men parted and Eddie followed the big man down a row of parked cars, walking gingerly. Each time his heel hit the blacktop the pain in his middle was magnified. His legs felt rubbery and he wondered how in his present condition he could deal with a man as large as the doctor, who was at least six inches taller and fifty pounds heavier than Eddie.

Eddie decided that he couldn't let the doctor see right away that he was hurt. A man that size, if he had any kind of nerve, could break Eddie in two if Eddie were to give him a chance.

The doctor was unlocking a silver Buick parked between two station wagons when Eddie stepped up behind him and pressed the .32 into the back of his expensive tweed coat and said, "Hold it. And keep quiet."

"What?" The big man stiffened against the gun.

"I said *quiet,*" Eddie said through his teeth. "Just open the door and reach in and unlock the back."

The man did as he was told. "Now get in," Eddie said. "Slowly."

The doctor slid into the driver's seat and Eddie let himself into the rear seat. "Now slide over to the passenger side."

"What do you want? If it's my money, you can have it." The voice was deep and steady, and as the doctor moved across the seat Eddie caught a glimpse of blue eyes and bushy white eyebrows in the rearview mirror.

Eddie reversed the automatic in his hand. "More than that, Doc,"

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he said, and rapped the doctor hard behind the right ear. The big man slumped forward and his forehead thudded against the padded dash.

Watching for activity in the parking lot, Eddie left the back seat and got behind the wheel. He struggled awkwardly to shift the doctor's considerable bulk low in the seat and tied his hands together at the wrists with strips of towel. He forced a folded handkerchief between the man's teeth and used the doctor's own necktie to secure the gag. Then he started the Buick. Backing out and driving away was difficult because the seat was adjusted for the tall man and Eddie couldn't change its position with the heavy, unconscious form beside him.

Eddie drove the longest ten miles of his life. It felt hot in the car, but the heat, he knew, came from within himself. The burning had spread. The cramps were worse and he felt the beginnings of nausea. He would have given ten years of his life for a drink of water, or even a spoonful to rinse his mouth with.

His captive was beginning to stir when Eddie pulled in at the motel, a small mom-and-pop operation that had been isolated by a new interstate highway. He drove around the end of the L-shaped structure out of sight of the office and parked alongside his own car in front of his room. He had to wait, each minute an eternity of escalating pain and apprehension, until the big man was able to follow his instructions and leave the car and stumble to the room.

Eddie followed with the gun held in his pocket. Inside, he prodded the doctor into the room's only chair. Then, feeling his prisoner's eyes following him as he opened his dilapidated suitcase and took out what appeared to be a pair of worn leather shaving-kit bags, he placed both bags on the top of the dresser and, jerking his chin toward the bags, he said, "You take chances, you learn to be prepared. I'm hurt, Doc, and you're going to help me." He rested a hand on one of the bags. "My own first-aid kit. It ain't what you're used to, but it'll do."

But how to do it? He looked at the doctor, dreading the inevitability of releasing those large, sure hands. Those hands could help him or stop him cold. *Cold,* Eddie thought. What if I pass out?

One way occurred to Eddie. He said, "Stand up."

The man struggled to his feet. The blue eyes glared a curious blend of emotions. Eddie asked, "Where's your wallet?"

The man indicated his inside breast pocket. Eddie pressed the

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barrel of the gun under the doctor's chin and extracted the wallet. Commanding the doctor to resume his seat, he went to the telephone and dialed Information for the number that went with the name and address on the driver's license in the wallet. He then dialed that number. After two rings a woman's voice answered, "Hello?"

Eddie smiled and hung up the telephone. He said to the doctor, "She's home. Your wife, daughter, or whoever. Want to keep her healthy?"

The doctor lunged from the chair and staggered forward. "Get back there," Eddie commanded. "*Now,* or you'll have a hole in your leg to slow you down!"

His captive lowered himself onto the chair once again. Partly shielding the telephone, Eddie dialed a number at random and deftly killed the connection with his thumb. Receiver in his left hand and gun in his right, he smiled at the doctor as he said into the soft dial tone, "Angelo? Yeah, it's me. I got a problem, but things are going to be fine if you do what I tell you."

The doctor was frowning. Eddie went on, "Get out to the home of James Harrigan at 7245 County Line Road in Wayfare. It shouldn't take you more than fifteen minutes from where you are. Latch onto the woman you find there and take her back to your place. I've got a problem and Dr. Harrigan's got to be convinced to help me." Eddie looked the doctor in the eyes as he added, "We'll let her go when I'm safe. If I don't call by ten o'clock tonight, you know what to do."

The big man appeared limp in the chair as Eddie hung up the phone. He had stopped struggling against his bonds.

"Sorry, Doc," said Eddie, "but I need help and I don't think you'd do it willingly. If you want to keep the lady alive, you'll see I get patched up." He opened both medical kits and spread their contents on the scarred top of the dresser, then, removing his jacket, he opened his shirt and unwrapped the towels. Touching the wound gingerly he said to the doctor, "There's a bullet in here, Doc. I need you to—"

He swallowed hard against the nausea that leaped suddenly from his gut to his throat. He could hear—or was it all feeling?—an ominous gurgling from deep inside him.

Working frantically with a small pair of scissors, he cut the bonds from the doctor's wrists. He raised his arms toward the necktie around the man's head but couldn't bear the added pain the motion brought with it. "Pull it off yourself!" Eddie said. "Just get to work, quick!" He stretched out on the nearest of the twin beds, holding the gun loosely in his right hand, as Harrigan pulled at the tightly

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knotted necktie around his head. For the first time it occurred to Eddie that he might actually die. "Hurry, for God's sake—hurry!" he said and something fell away from Lucky Eddie as he looked up at the big man and added, "Please!"

Finally free of the gag the big man said, "You fool—you damned stupid fool! I can't help you!"

"You've got to," Eddie pleaded. "I know this ain't a hospital but you've got my first-aid stuff. And I know you're good—I heard on the bus how you saved some rich guy today."

The big man looked sad and helpless. His voice lost all timbre as he said, "I operated on a fictional character, someone who doesn't exist. *I'm an actor.* I play a surgeon on the *Municipal Hospital* daytime soap."

"Oh, please, no," Eddie moaned. He let the gun slip from his hand.

Harrigan moved away. Eddie was dimly aware of the telephone being dialed. He heard soft speech but couldn't make out the words.

A moment later Harrigan returned, looming large and out of proportion in Eddie's misted vision. He said, "I've called 911. An ambulance is on the way. You'll be in the hands of a real doctor in time to save you—if you're lucky."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

HACK ROBBER

by JOHN LARGE

Though they call me a literal nothing,
And an author of lowliest rank,
I keep doing my well-worded-note thing
And laugh all the way from the bank.

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

"In England, a popular name for a pub is the Cat and Fiddle . . . the scholarly view is that the name came over from France with the Norman Conquest and is in fact a corruption into English of le chat fidele *(the faithful cat)."—from* How To Talk to Your Cat *by Patricia Moyes (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Signet-New American Library, and Arthur Barker, Ltd.)*

THE FAITHFUL CAT

by PATRICIA MOYES

The fact that Hubert Withers decided one Thursday morning not to murder his wife after all should not be ascribed to kindness, change of heart, nor any moral scruples, but to a mixture of squeamishness and cowardice, plus the realization that he could get what he wanted by other means. Hubert was a small man and had always shrunk from violence of any kind. The thought of actually killing Caroline made him feel quite nauseous. Also, there was the risk of being caught. However ingenious his plan, a husband who stood to inherit his wife's fortune would automatically be Suspect Number One.

Nevertheless, he had to have money—and very soon. It would be nice, of course, to have Caroline permanently out of the way and to come into his inheritance—but he now saw that the matter might be dealt with in a less drastic manner. If he could get her removed for even a short while and get a Power of Attorney to act on her behalf—that is, to sign checks and draw cash—all would be well.

It wasn't that Hubert particularly disliked Caroline. She wasn't

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a bad old thing at all really, although of course he had married her strictly for her money. She was the plain, shy daughter (and only child) of a widower who had made a fortune in the construction business in Washington, D.C., and she stood to pick up the lot when the old man died.

During her life, Caroline Todman had made few friends. At school—an extremely expensive private establishment where all the girls were by definition heiresses—her only real friend had been another girl, also plain but less shy, called Annabel: but Annabel had married the impoverished younger son of a British nobleman and was now Lady Fairley, living in a very grand Elizabethan manor house in southern England—bought with Annabel's money, naturally. Several times Annabel had written suggesting that Caroline should visit England and stay with her and her husband, but Caroline had felt too shy to make the trip alone.

Despite her plainness and shyness, Caroline had had plenty of suitors, as any girl in her position was bound to have, but old Todman, her father, swore he could pick out a fortune hunter at a hundred yards. Even Caroline herself got to be quite good at it, and this tended to increase her timidity and to put her off young men. Thus she had remained unmarried until the age of thirty.

Hubert Withers appeared to be the only man who had ever wanted her for herself alone. He, too, appeared to be very shy, and although he was reasonably good-looking he disguised the fact by wearing unbecoming steel-rimmed spectacles and a wispy moustache. He had been observing Caroline Todman's movements, and so cleverly contrived to meet her for the first time in the Georgetown Public Library. They started talking about books, and he shyly invited her out for a cup of coffee at a cheap café, apparently quite unaware of who she was.

Caroline was enchanted, and even old Todman grunted his approval. The young man appeared pleasant enough, and seemed stupefied the first time Caroline invited him home to the family mansion, which stood in a couple of acres of garden in superfashionable Georgetown. Hubert had stammered out that he'd had no idea she was the daughter of *the* Arnold Todman. It was an excellent performance—Hubert should really have been an actor.

As it was, however, he confided frankly—but shyly—to his prospective father-in-law that he was simply an impecunious student, several years younger than Caroline, and without any means of visible support except his student grant. He was working, he said,

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on a definitive thesis on the impact of witchcraft on medieval European thought. As a matter of fact, it was a subject which interested him mildly, and he knew enough about it to talk convincingly to a millionaire who had started life as an unskilled building laborer.

Todman gave his consent—but on one condition. The very condition for which Hubert had been hoping. That young Withers should consign his interest in historical research to the status of a hobby, and take a job with The Firm.

"Start at the bottom, my boy, as I did. You'll soon make good."

One look at Hubert had decided Arnold Todman that for this frail intellectual the bottom of the construction industry did not mean a job as a builder's laborer. Instead, Hubert was allotted a place in the more comfortable and less strenuous side of the bottom of the business—a glorified office boy, who happened to be married to the daughter of the boss.

This might have worked out very well, except for one fact. It became painfully obvious within a few months that Hubert was simply no good. It was probably just as well that Arnold Todman dropped dead of a heart attack before any of his senior staff had plucked up the courage to tell him that Hubert was, and always would be, hopeless. Arnold died happy, knowing that Caroline was married and that his son-in-law would soon make his way in The Firm. He left everything he had—including his controlling share in the business—to Caroline.

Caroline herself knew very little about The Firm, except that it provided a handsome income. She took the advice of the senior executives of the company and soon began to get a sound grasp of the business. She suggested tactfully to Hubert that since they no longer needed the extra money he should quit his so-called job and go back to the research on which he had always been so keen. Hubert agreed, with relief. His satisfaction with the situation was tempered only by the fact that Caroline, although as plain and shy as ever, kept a tight hold on the family purse-strings.

In the Todman mansion, where they now lived, the magnificent library had been handed over to Hubert for his research work, and space cleared on the shelves for his books of reference. Caroline organized the house, dealt with all finances, and kept in touch with The Firm. Hubert spent lonely and frustrated hours in the library. He was regarded with great deference by the household staff.

"The Master is working on his book," the butler would say with

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great severity to a giggling maid or a clumsy kitchen boy. "Don't you know that he needs complete quiet?"

So Hubert got complete quiet, and it nearly drove him mad. In fact, what saved his sanity was that he began to fill in his Saharan hours by gambling on horses.

Naturally, as the husband of Caroline (née Todman), his credit with book-makers was excellent. Nevertheless, the fact remained that all he had was the pin-money doled out in cash by his wife--"After all, darling, you can charge everything, can't you?"—and matters had now reached a point where his creditors were demanding payment, and that without delay. He had stalled them for a while by quietly selling a valuable picture from the Blue Morning Room—a place Caroline seldom visited—but that was only a sop to the wolves. Soon the crunch must come.

As Hubert saw it, he had two alternatives. He could confess the whole thing to Caroline, who would undoubtedly pay his debts for the sake of family honor: but thenceforth his life would be untenable. Or he could kill her.

The fact that he had a third choice came to him, as has been remarked, on a Thursday morning in spring. Caroline, who had been complaining of internal pains, had been taken to the hospital for tests and observation on the Wednesday, and on Thursday Hubert was telephoned by Dr. Edwards—an old family friend as well as the Todman medical adviser.

"I'm afraid," the doctor said, "that Mrs. Withers must be operated on immediately."

"What is it?" asked Hubert, hoping he sounded suitably worried, for his heart had given an upward leap.

He was quickly disillusioned. "Oh, nothing dangerous, now that we've discovered it in time," the doctor reassured him. "She has a large but happily not malignant growth on her womb. This is undoubtedly why she hasn't had any children. I would like to think it can be removed without a complete hysterectomy, but—"

"A complete what?" said Hubert, who knew little of medical matters.

"Removal of the womb and ovaries," explained Dr. Edwards. "Not a dangerous operation—but I'm very much afraid, old man, that you'll have to face the fact that Caroline will never be able to have a baby."

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This suited Hubert fine, but he made appropriate noises of regret. It was then that Dr. Edwards produced his life-saving bombshell.

"I must impress on you, Mr. Withers," he said, "that although relatively simple medically, this operation can have quite serious mental after-effects on a woman. The surgeon, you see, is doing in half an hour what nature does gradually over a period of many years. The result is that some women suffer severe post-operative depression. I don't want to frighten you, but sometimes they may have delusions and even become slightly unbalanced for a while. So I want you to be especially kind and considerate to your wife when she comes home from the hospital."

"Of course," said Hubert.

"The best thing," the doctor went on, "is for the woman to get a pet of some sort—a surrogate child, if you like. She may well transfer to it the pent-up affection for the child she now knows she can never have."

"Caroline has a pet already," said Hubert. "A Siamese cat." He tried to keep the dislike out of his voice. He had always hated the creature, with its steady blue eyes and supercilious manner.

"And she's fond of it?" pursued Dr. Edwards.

"She dotes on it," said Hubert. "She's even found a Siamese name for it—Pakdee, which means the faithful cat."

"Then it's splendid," said the doctor. "The cat will probably be able to do more for her than either you or I can."

A plan was forming in Hubert's mind. He said, "I was just thinking—when she's strong enough, it might be a good thing for her to take a vacation."

"Excellent. Excellent."

"I won't be able to get away myself," said Hubert, "but Caroline has an old school-friend who is married and lives in England. Lady Annabel Fairley. Annabel has been begging her to go and visit."

"A most satisfactory scheme, if Caroline agrees," said the doctor. "I wouldn't have liked her to go to some hotel on her own, but a visit to a friend and a complete change of scene—yes, by all means."

So, in a couple of weeks, Caroline was back from the hospital and recovering rapidly. She appeared to suffer from none of the ill effects the doctor had predicted, but this didn't prevent Hubert's fertile imagination from inventing them.

Each time the doctor called—for even today doctors will pay house

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calls on people like Caroline—Hubert managed to have a word with him alone before he left.

"Our patient seems to be making excellent progress," the doctor would say.

"Well—yes and no, Doctor."

"How do you mean?"

"Of course you wouldn't notice it, just visiting, but you did warn me, and I think you ought to know that the thing is becoming an obsession."

"Thing? What thing, Mr. Withers?"

"This business of the Siamese cat. She won't let him out of her sight." Indeed, Pakdee had been snuggled up with Caroline on the daybed where she was resting when the doctor arrived. Hubert went on, "She even has a crazy idea that somebody is out to harm the cat. I can't help feeling it's not healthy for somebody to be so wrapped up in a mere animal."

"I told you, Mr. Withers, it's quite natural." Dr. Edwards was reassuring. "It will pass."

A few days later, while Benson, the butler, was serving cocktails, Hubert suggested to Caroline that she might visit the Fairleys in England. Caroline was enthusiastic. Since her marriage and her involvement with the business, she had become much more self-reliant. "What a good idea, Hubert. I'll call her tomorrow. You'll come too, won't you?"

"I wish I could, darling," said Hubert, "but I've had a word with Bentinck"—Bentinck was The Firm's managing director—"and he doesn't feel we should both be out of the country at the same time. Besides, I've never even met Annabel. You'll have much more fun on your own."

"Yes, perhaps I will," said Caroline cheerfully. "I wish I could take Dee-Dee, but one can't, with the silly British quarantine regulations. Still, you'll look after him for me, won't you, Hubert?"

Dee-Dee was Caroline's pet-name for Pakdee. It revolted Hubert almost as much as the cat's parlor trick, which he would perform for nobody but Caroline. Every time Caroline returned home after an outing, she would stand in the hallway and call "Dee-Dee!" in a particular tone of voice. Wherever the cat might be, he would come hurtling at the sound and with one leap would be in Caroline's arms, his dark-brown front legs embracing her and his face buried in the hollow of her neck. The whole thing make Hubert feel slightly sick.

Now, however, all that he said was, "Of course I will, darling, you

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know that." Soon he was able to report to Dr. Edwards that Caroline seemed much better and had agreed to go and visit her friend in England.

It was on the morning of the doctor's final checkup visit, while Caroline was sitting on the sofa with Pakdee on her lap, that Hubert said, "So it's all fixed? You go to England on the twentieth?"

"That's right," said Caroline. "The agency has made me a first-class booking on the lunchtime flight."

In the same pleasant even tone, Hubert said, "I may as well tell you now that as soon as you have gone, I intend to get rid of that cat."

"It should be—" Caroline did a double-take. "You intend to *what?*"

"Get rid of Pakdee," said Hubert. "I shall have him destroyed. Make no mistake about that, my dear." He left the room.

Dr. Edwards found his patient in near-hysterical tears. As far as he could make out, her husband had threatened to have the cat destroyed as soon as she left for England. She absolutely refused to go. Nothing would make her. Hubert must have gone mad. When the doctor suggested that she might have misunderstood her husband, Caroline clasped the cat even more firmly to her heart and sobbed that the doctor was as bad as Hubert and probably in league with him. Dr. Edwards persuaded her to take a sedative and went in search of Hubert.

Hubert sighed deeply. "Oh dear," he said. "So it's started all over again. How very distressing. I suppose it's the idea of going abroad that's upset her. She's seemed so much more rational lately."

Edwards cleared his throat. "I don't suppose, Mr. Withers, that you might inadvertently have made any remark that might have led her to think—"

"Of course not!" Hubert was suitably indignant. "Why, only the other day I assured her I would do everything to care for the cat while she was away. I believe Benson was there, serving drinks. He must have heard me. I'll ring for him now."

The doctor was deeply embarrassed. "My dear Mr. Withers, there's no need. Of course, I believe what you say."

Hubert, however, was adament. "No, no, I insist." His finger was already on the bell. "This is all so worrying in its implications that I think you should feel convinced about poor Caroline's delusions."

Benson appeared, and dutifully confirmed what Hubert had said. Of course, he added, in answer to the doctor's questions, the cat was

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Madam's, and Madam had a special affection for him. On the other hand, he had never known the Master to be other than most kind and considerate to the animal. When he saw him, that was. Madam and the cat spent most of their time together.

The cat was not allowed in the kitchen, but Madam always fed him herself in the butler's pantry. While Madam was away, he, Benson, would be happy to undertake this duty personally. Benson was an English butler of the old school, inherited with the house from Arnold Todman, and he had known and been fond of Caroline since her childhood. In listing Caroline's scant number of friends, Benson should have been included.

"Well," said Dr. Edwards when Benson had withdrawn, "this is, as you say, a sad setback. I feel it more important than ever that she should get away for a vacation. On the other hand, since she can't take the cat with her, we must somehow convince her that she simply imagined your threat. Shall we talk to her together?"

They talked to Caroline together, and they talked to her separately. Hubert protested over and over again that he would cherish Pakdee. Benson promised to hand-feed him and to let Caroline know at once by telephone if anything seemed to be the matter with him.

Finally, Caroline was convinced. In fact, she was more than convinced, she was very frightened—for she now truly believed she had been suffering from delusions. It's always a little scary to feel that one may be going slightly mad.

Dr. Edwards, speaking privately to Hubert, said that he had high hopes that Caroline's vacation in England would put an end to any further symptoms, especially when she returned to find her cat in good health. However, he added, changing to a more somber vocal gear, if delusions still persisted on her return, it might be necessary for her to take a cure in a quiet nursing home for a few weeks.

Hubert saw Caroline off at Dulles Airport, making all the right gestures and saying all the right things. Just as the doors were closing on the mobile lounge which was to take London-bound passengers to their waiting jumbo jet, he said, softly and pleasantly, "I shall have Pakdee destroyed this evening. Goodbye, darling. Have a wonderful time."

Caroline cried all the way to London, despite—or perhaps because of—the excellent champagne with which the air hostess plied her, hoping to cheer her up. As soon as she arrived at Fairley Hall, which was after midnight by British time, she insisted on telephoning

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home and speaking to Benson. He assured her that Pakdee was hale and hearty and enjoying his supper—it was seven o'clock in the evening, Washington time.

"I'm delighted you had a smooth journey, Madam," said Benson. "I'll fetch the Master to speak to you right away."

"No . . . No, don't do that, Benson," said Caroline. "Don't tell him I called." She rang off.

Early next morning Hubert said to Benson, "I've been looking up Pakdee's health card. He's due for his yearly shots very soon."

"Yes, sir," said Benson. "Madam was remarking the same thing only the other day."

"Well, no time like the present. Call the Animal Hospital, will you, and make an appointment for this morning? Then find me the cat basket and I'll take him along."

So a couple of hours later Hubert drove to the Animal Hospital with a surly, silent Pakdee glaring from his wicker basket on the passenger seat of the Jaguar. The cat was duly given his inoculations and the details entered on his health card. On the way home, however, Hubert took a side street, doubled back, and drove to an entirely different address. It was that of a veterinarian he had never met but had picked from the Yellow Pages on account of the fact that he lived in an outlying suburb to the south of the city, in Virginia. His name was Michaelson, and Hubert—identifying himself as Mr. Robinson—had made an appointment with him from a public phone booth before leaving Dulles Airport the previous day.

Dr. Michaelson was a tall thin man with a long, slightly vague face and long-fingered, sensitive hands. Pakdee calmed down as soon as he got into the surgery, and allowed himself to be lifted out of the basket.

"Well," said Michaelson, admiringly, "you sure have a beautiful and valuable cat here, Mr. Robinson. He seems in fine fettle. Is anything wrong, or does he just need shots?"

"He needs more than shots," said Hubert. "He's to be destroyed."

"You can't mean that, Mr. Robinson."

"Oh, it's nothing to do with me," said Hubert crossly. "It's my wife. She bought him as a toy, and now she's tired of him. He's got to go."

"And there's nothing the matter with him?"

"Not that I know of."

The vet looked thoughtful. He said, "I never like to destroy a

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young, healthy animal. Especially such a fine specimen. Are you sure you wouldn't like me to find a good home for him?"

"I want to see that cat killed," said Hubert with unattractive firmness. "I'm paying you to do it. The cat is mine, and I can do as I like with him. Come on, get it over with."

"You're absolutely adamant, Mr. Robinson?"

"Absolutely. And I want to see it done."

Michaelson sighed. "Very well," he said. He went to a cupboard and began to prepare a syringe. "Do you want to take the body away with you?"

"Certainly not."

"Some people," said Michaelson, gently ironic, "care enough about their pets to bury them in their gardens. However, if you wish me to dispose of him—"

"Yes, I do. Do what you like—just get rid of him."

"Very well." Michaelson stroked Pakdee gently. "Come on then, old fellow. This won't hurt."

Hubert tried not to look as the needle went in, but somehow he couldn't keep his eyes off the cat. Pakdee turned his head with his last strength, and gave Hubert such a look of concentrated hatred from his deep blue eyes that Hubert took an instinctive step backwards. Then Pakdee keeled over and lay still.

Hubert pulled himself together. Averting his eyes from the body, he said, "Well, that's that. Thank you. What do I owe you?"

Michaelson said, "Nothing, Mr. Robinson. I never make a charge for destroying animals—whether it's to put them out of their misery or whether they're in perfect health." The tone of his voice exactly matched Pakdee's dying stare.

Hubert picked up the basket and made his escape. As he passed through the waiting room, he felt acutely conscious of the empty basket he was carrying . The only occupant waiting to see the doctor was a severe-faced middle-aged lady who also held a cat basket, which was occupied by a nondescript tabby.

"I'm sorry to see you've had to leave your cat with the doctor," she remarked. "Is it something serious, or is he just boarding?"

Hubert muttered something about just boarding, and hurried out to the car. He didn't for the moment feel up to anything more than finding a bar and having a stiff drink. Everywhere he looked, he seemed to see Pakdee's eyes. It was unfortunate that in the course of his so-called research he had just been reading a book on the connection between cats and witchcraft. Perhaps Caroline was a

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witch and Pakdee had been her familiar spirit. He ordered another drink, and told himself not to be a fool. After all, his plan was only half complete. Pakdee had gone forever, but there was the question of his successor.

After an hour or so, Hubert felt strong enough to resume his journey, with the empty cat basket as passenger. This time he drove around the Beltway and off into the northernmost Maryland suburbs, to another address he'd found in the Yellow Pages. This was a private humane society, which he'd picked as being as far as possible distant from the Michaelson surgery. The society, which announced in its advertisement that it never destroyed a healthy animal, acted as a lost-and-found agency and a sort of adoption society for cats. Hubert had also telephoned them from Dulles, giving his name as Mr. Green. His wife, he said, had set her heart on having a seal-point Siamese cat, having just lost her elderly but much-loved one. Did they have any for adoption?

"We don't have any kittens at the moment." Hubert had been surprised to hear a masculine voice on the line. He had always supposed that these places were run by cranky old ladies.

"Oh, we don't want a kitten," said Hubert quickly. "An adult cat. About two years old."

"Ah, then I think we can help you. Adult animals are always more difficult to place. Seal-point Siamese, you said? Yes, we have no less than three."

"I'll be along after lunch tomorrow," Hubert had said.

He lunched in a small Maryland restaurant where he knew he wouldn't be recognized, and then drove to the Society's address, which turned out to be a small suburban house with half an acre of garden.

The whole place seemed to Hubert to be swarming with cats of all ages, sizes and colors—some in spacious wire runs, some roaming freely. A covey of them were gently shooed away by the benign elderly gentleman who opened the front door, introducing himself as Mr. O'Donnell.

"Ah, Mr. Green," he beamed. "So nice to see you. Please come in. I'll take you to the drawing-room—that's the one place cats are not allowed." He ushered Hubert into a small, shabbily furnished room. "I daresay you find this a rather strange establishment, but it's very worthwhile work. Makes a contribution, you know."

Hubert felt sure that he, too, would be expected to make a contribution. He had the money with him.

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Mr. O'Donnell was still talking. "A seal-point Siamese, I think you said. About two years old."

"That's right," said Hubert. "A neutered male."

"A neutered male? You didn't mention that. That cuts down the choice a little, but—yes, we do have two. I'll fetch them, and you can choose."

Left alone, Hubert ran over his plan in his mind. It seemed to him a good one. All Siamese cats, in his view, looked very much alike—except perhaps to the eye of love. Certainly none of the domestic staff—not even Benson—knew Pakdee well enough to be able to identify him positively. Dr. Edwards had only seen the cat on a couple of fleeting occasions. Only Caroline would accept no substitutes—especially in view of the fact that the new cat would certainly not respond to her call with Pakdee's parlor-trick. He knew—because he'd been listening in—about Caroline's call to Benson the previous evening, and guessed that a similar call would be made daily. Benson would be uniformly reassuring. So, when Caroline returned and claimed that the cat in the house was not her cat—well, Dr. Edwards would certainly prescribe the quiet nursing home, which would enable Hubert to get the Power of Attorney he needed. Even a couple of weeks would be long enough . . .

He was aroused from his reverie by the return of Mr. O'Donnell, carrying a cat under each arm.

"There we are," he said, putting the animals down on the floor. "Delightful creatures, both of them. Take your choice."

There was never any doubt. One of the cats was noticeably larger than Pakdee, and his "points" were a much lighter shade of brown. The other, however, was perfectly possible. True, his whole coat was paler than Pakdee's, fluffier and less sleek, and his eyes were not only lighter blue, but mild and amiable. However, he was just about the right size, and Hubert felt sure he would fool everybody except Caroline.

"There's no charge for the cat, of course," Mr. O'Donnell assured him, "but any little donation you feel inclined to make . . ."

Hubert made his donation and popped the counterfeit Pakdee into the basket, where he sat purring, his gentle eyes half shut. In fact, by the time Hubert had reiterated to Mr. O'Donnell that they had owned a Siamese before, and therefore did not require the leaflets on care and feeding the Society provided, the cat had curled up in Pakdee's basket and was sound asleep.

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Benson met Hubert at the front door and took the basket from him. "I hope the little fellow is quite all right, sir," he said. "We were a mite worried when you didn't return for luncheon."

"Sorry about that, Benson," said Hubert. "Matter of business I had to attend to, which involved lunching out." He hesitated. "Pakdee seems a little lethargic," he added. "Probably the effect of the shots. But the doctor says he's in excellent health. Just give him a light meal tonight."

"As you say, sir."

Hubert had been right. Caroline telephoned again that evening and spoke to Benson. When she heard that Pakdee had been taken to the hospital for shots, she panicked again—to the consternation of her friend Annabel. Only after she had phoned her veterinarian at his home and learned from him that Mr. Withers had, indeed, brought Pakdee in that morning for his inoculations did Caroline calm down. Annabel had a word with her husband, and together they decided to write to Hubert and tell him that they were worried about Caroline's nerves and her apparent obsession about her cat.

The letter arrived the day before Caroline's return, and was even more than Hubert could have hoped for. He called Dr. Edwards at once—he had intended to do so, anyway, but this gave him a God-sent opportunity. He suggested that the doctor should arrange to be at the house to welcome Caroline home and see her reunion with her beloved cat. The doctor agreed.

During Caroline's absence, Hubert had barely set eyes on the Siamese, who had been entirely in Benson's care. He had taken pains, however, to inquire frequently about the cat's well being, and had been assured by Benson that the little fellow was fine, eating well and quite his old self. Very satisfactory.

On the day Caroline was due back, Hubert entertained the doctor to lunch and left him to his post-prandial coffee as he went off to Dulles to meet his wife.

Caroline was looking remarkably well. She inquired at once about Pakdee, and Hubert assured her that he was in good form.

"He missed you, of course, darling," he said, "but Benson and I tried to make it up to him. He'll be thrilled to see you."

On the drive back down the lovely George Washington Parkway, Caroline chattered happily about England and her friends. Hubert was silent. He was bracing himself, with a mixture of emotions, for the scene that would shortly follow. It was bound to be unpleasant,

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and he disliked unpleasantness. There would be hysterics, and he disliked hysterics. Nevertheless, his plan would work. It could not fail. And Dr. Edwards himself would be there to see it.

Benson heard the car in the drive, and had the front door open before Caroline had reached the top step.

"Welcome home, Madam!"

"Oh, Benson, it's nice to be back." Caroline came into the big hallway as the doctor came out of the drawing-room. "Why, Dr. Edwards, I didn't know you'd be here! How very kind of you! Yes, I feel splendid. I had a marvelous vacation!"

She put down her handbag and, as Hubert came in through the front door, she called, "Dee-Dee! I'm home, Dee-Dee!"

The cat must have been waiting on the stairs, on the landing where there was a window overlooking the front door. He came down the last flight like a flying bomb and leapt into Caroline's arms, purring his delight. And, as Caroline caressed him, he looked at Hubert over her shoulder. The old, hard blue eyes now gleaming with triumph. The old sleek coat. Pakdee.

"My Dee-Dee," Caroline was murmuring. "My Pakdee! My faithful cat."

It was Hubert who spent the next few weeks in the quiet nursing home. Soon after his release from it, he and Caroline were divorced. When last heard of, Hubert was in California, looking for another heiress. He was somehow managing to live on the meager allowance Caroline's lawyers sent him every month. The allowance would have been much larger—for Caroline was a generous soul—had Hubert not, in his frenzy, declared that she was a witch and that he had seen Pakdee die with his own eyes.

Dr. Edwards tried to put in a good word for Hubert. "He was mentally deranged, Mrs. Withers. How could he possibly have seen the cat die when it was obviously alive and well? I think you must make allowances."

"He had the intention," said Caroline. "That is what matters."

Funnily enough, it was only a few days after Caroline's return that Dr. Michaelson visited the private humane society in Maryland, bringing with him half a dozen delightful kittens for adoption.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you had no difficulty in finding a home for that beautiful Siamese?"

"Which one?" asked Mr. O'Donnell.

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"Oh," said Mrs. O'Donnell, her severe face softening into a very sweet smile. "John means the one I picked up from his surgery. Some miserable man had brought him in to be destroyed, because he said his wife was tired of him—the cat, I mean."

"I suppose I should have destroyed him," said John Michaelson, "but he was an absolute beauty, and in perfect health. I took no money and got Robinson's permission to dispose of the cat as I wished. By that time, I'd given him a pre-operation anesthetic shot, and the man went away convinced he was dead. I knew Grace was in the waiting room and could bring him back here right away."

"That's right," said Grace O'Donnell. "I gave him a bath and blow-dry—he emerged several shades lighter, I can tell you—and some eye drops I thought he needed. Then I went out shopping and, believe it or not, by the time I came back Patrick had found a home for him with a—a Mr. Green, wasn't it, Patrick?"

"Yes, my dear. A nice guy, he seemed. Had had Siamese before. Wanted this one as a present for his wife, who'd just lost hers."

"Mr. Green seems to have a much nicer wife than Mr. Robinson," said Grace O'Donnell. "I'm sure the poor creature is in a very happy home now."

He is, Mrs. O'Donnell. He is.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

ROOTS OF DETECTION: Yes, there was detective fiction (or at least detection *in* fiction) before Sherlock Holmes, and not just from the pen of Edgar Allan Poe. Bruce Cassiday's new anthology, *Roots of Detection: The Art of Deduction Before Sherlock Holmes* (Ungar, $6.95 paper, $12.95 cloth), begins with the Greek historian Herodotus and reprints 14 stories and sections of novels that amply illustrate the early development of detective fiction. Far from inventing the use of detection as a plot device, Poe's real contribution was in presenting us with stories in which detection was the major element of the plot. We see in these selections just how close other authors came to anticipating Poe. With a slightly different emphasis to his plots, an author like E. T. A. Hoffman might have been the father of the detective story!

Authors include Voltaire, Hoffman, Bulwer-Lytton, Vidocq, Poe, Dumas, Dickens, Collins, Gaboriau, and others, and Cassiday's Introduction and commentaries blend the selections into an entertaining literary history of detection before Holmes.

FAN CLUBS: Coe-Stark Associates, a fan club for readers of Donald E. Westlake, "Tucker Coe," and "Richard Stark," has been organized by D. Kingsley Hahn. Two issues of a fact-filled bimonthly newsletter, *The ParkerPhile,* have appeared thus far, named for the anti-hero protagonist of the Stark novels, and we hope that doesn't confuse fans of Robert Parker. Subscription and membership are $5.00 a year from D. Kingsley Hahn, 1495 Magnolia Avenue East #2, St. Paul, MN 55106.

Yet another Hammett fan club has been formed in California. The Maltese Falcon Hunt Society plans to hold bimonthly meetings and issue a journal, *The Talon,* twice a year. Membership including *The Talon* is $10.00, or $5.00 for the journal alone, from The Maltese Falcon Hunt Society, % Roy H. Bobbin, 988 Faris Drive, San Jose, CA 95111.

FIRST UPFIELD: Fans of Arthur W. Upfield should know that his first novel, *The House of Cain*

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(1929), has been reissued by Dennis McMillan, 1353 4th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94122, with an Introduction by Philip José Farmer ($20.00, cloth). It's about a secret haven for murderers in the Australian Outback. Upfield's detective "Bony" does not appear. Dennis McMillan plans to reissue two other early Upfields soon—*A Royal Abduction* and *Gripped by Drought.*

MURDER AT THE ZOO: A new short story by Bill Pronzini, *Cat's-Paw,* has been published in a $15.00 limited edition by Waves Press, 4040 MacArthur Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227. It's about an impossible crime at the San Francisco zoo, solved by his Nameless detective. A collection of Pronzini's best short stories, *Graveyard Plots,* will be reaching bookstores from Delta Publishing this summer. Eleven of the 21 stories are from *EQMM.*

SHERLOCKIANA: A phrenological study of Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Game's A Head* by Madeleine B. Stern, has been published in a 24-page limited-edition booklet by Paulette Greene, 140 Princeton Road, Rockville Centre, NY 11570 ($15.00, numbered and signed).

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Josh Pachter's anthology of top mystery writers' favorite stories, mentioned here earlier, will have its first English-language edition when Dent publishes it in Britain this July. *Top Crime: The Authors' Choice* contains 30 stories, with new Introductions by Leslie Charteris, Dorothy Salisbury Davis, Stanley Ellin, Michael Gilbert, Ed McBain, Ellery Queen, Georges Simenon, Julian Symons, and others.

Coming late this summer from Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison, IN 47250, is *The Sound of Detection: Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio* ($6.95, paper). The book contains some 80 pages of text by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and a week-by-week log of the entire Ellery Queen radio series by Nevins and radio buff Ray Stanich.

Two June titles: *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory,* edited by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $9.95 paper, $22.95 cloth), and *The Crafts of Crime: Conversations with Crime Writers* by John Carr (Houghton Mifflin, $8.95 paper, $15.95 cloth). Both sound interesting.

Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini are editing an anthology of mystery and suspense stories told from the viewpoint of children and teenagers. It's called *Child's Ploy,* and Macmillan will publish it late this year.

Avon will publish the fourth of its themed anthologies edited by Isaac Asimov, Carol-Lynn Waugh, and Martin H. Greenberg this October. Appropriately enough, it's titled *Halloween Horrors.*

Dodd, Mead is publishing a new hardcover edition of Chesterton's *The Father Brown Omnibus* in June, with an Introduction by Auberon Waugh ($10.95).

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The courtroom mystery film has in recent years been in recess, although the early sound movies often translated the drama of the American legal system to the screen. Indeed, because of bulky and clumsy recording equipment, the need for lengthy dialogue without a lot of movement made courtrooms ideal settings. Sidney Lumet's new movie, *The Verdict,* however, falls somewhat into that familiar pattern, bringing back to us memories of investigative attorneys unraveling the secrets of a case.

Actually, *The Verdict* does not declare itself a mystery. Rather, it tells of a sodden, disillusioned, ambulance-chasing lawyer who takes on a medical malpractice suit against all odds, bringing his own life back into order in the struggle. But his probing of the powerful forces lined up against him, the evidence he with great difficulty uncovers, the surprise witness he manages to bring forth at the eleventh hour are all worthy of a Perry Mason. Paul Newman, who plays the man, joins a distinguished lineup of legal heroes setting off courtroom fireworks.

Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason is of course among the most familiar of these dynamos. For a full decade on television, Raymond Burr had less than fifty minutes in each trial to unmask the guilty party, who never turned out to be the defendant. Earlier, in six films during the Thirties, Mason brought his flamboyant oratory to movie-theater screens. His clients included husband-murderers, newlyweds, blackmail victims, and stammering clerics, and Mason is not above bending the law himself to unfailingly expose a surprise culprit—who confesses immediately—during a climactic trial sequence. This is a lawyer who never loses a case!

Other lawyers did. In *Disbarred* (1939), attorney Otto Kruger —prohibited from practicing in court—grooms young lady lawyer Gail Russell to defend bigtime racketeers; Sidney Blackmer pulled the same legal trick in an earlier film, *Behind the Green Lights* (1935)—which referred to the green lamps outside police stations. Movies have always been fascinated by the machinations of the law and its corruptions. In *Counsel for Crime* (1937), fighting young D.A. Douglass Montgomery prosecutes criminal lawyer Kruger only to learn later the man is his father—one of many films savoring that courtroom twist.

The jury process, too, made a frequent film subject. In *Ladies of the Jury* (1932), crusty Edna May Oliver manages to dominate the murder jury to which she's assigned; in *The Jury's Secret* (1938),

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the jurors themselves discover new evidence in a labor leader's murder trial; in *Grand Jury Secrets* (1939), a newspaper reporter learns of a crime conspiracy while eavesdropping on a jury-room session. Ultimately, *Perfect Strangers* (1950) presents us with two jurors—Ginger Rogers and Dennis Morgan—who fall in love while serving on a murder trial, and how it affects the verdict. Jury deliberations are the basis of Sidney Lumet's earlier *Twelve Angry Men* (1957).

Sometimes civic duty can be dangerous, though, and several spirited melodramas have executed criminals return to eliminate those who sentenced them—judge and jurors too. Edgar Wallace movies used this plot more than once (catch especially *The Terrible People),* but the device is perhaps at its wildest in *The Missing Juror* (1944), in which tortured judge George Macready learns the man he sentenced to death was innocent.

This situation reverses when dynamic defense attorneys realize that the murderers they have successfully exonerated are actually guilty. In two films, the lawyers involved then go to extreme lengths to see that justice is done. Both Walter Pidgeon in *The Unknown Man* (1951) and Raymond Burr in *Please Murder Me* (1956) manipulate events so that their killer clients turn on their defenders.

Of course, we have been discussing mere program films; occasionally a motion picture probing truth on trial rises to high art. One such is *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), wherein a country lawyer sifts the private passions that have led to a perhaps justifiable killing —somewhat similarly dealt with in *The Story on Page One* (1960). Perhaps the best courtroom film of all is Billy Wilder's brilliant version of Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), in which an ailing, crusty, but brilliant old barrister—"Sir Wilfred the Fox they call him, and fox he is!" gasps his admiring nurse—discovers himself incredibly manipulated.

Paul Newman in *The Verdict* is also a fox, outdistancing the hounds—and his manipulations win the day. Hopefully this intricate, absorbing legal drama may usher courtroom mystery films back into session.

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INTERVIEW: NEDRA TYRE (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: Your first detective novel, *Mouse in Eternity* (Knopf), was nominated for an Edgar for best first novel of 1952. Did you celebrate?

TYRE: I didn't celebrate because I didn't feel for a second that it

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would win. But I gloated a little, I confess, because it had such a long, difficult time in finding a publisher.

EQMN: Besides your novels, you've written dozens of highly praised and memorable short stories. Your first in *EQMM,* "Murder at the Poe Shrine," in the September 1955 issue, was certainly appropriate as well as memorable.

TYRE: I did enough research in writing that story for a shelf of books. I went to the places and sites of places in Richmond connected with Poe and the Allan family. I went to the University of Virginia to see his room. I went countless times to the Shrine. I talked at length with the curator, a marvelously informed and gracious woman. I read biographies and criticism. I memorized much of his poetry.

Later I thought of writing another story located at the Shrine, to be called "More Crime at the Shrine," but by then they had changed the name to the Edgar Allan Poe Museum. So I couldn't use the word "shrine" in the title. I'm paranoic about titles. I can't write until I've decided upon a title and when it's later changed for any reason, however valid, I go all to pieces because to me the title is as intrinsic as the text itself. Have you ever come across anyone else with this exaggerated attitude toward titles?

EQMN: Most authors don't like title changes unless they're an obvious improvement or they weren't comfortable with the one they had.

TYRE: In any case, I must say that museum is a far more appropriate name than shrine was for the Poe collection. Shrine was a little too holy, don't you think, for a writer, even though he did invent the detective story?

EQMN: Well, it would certainly make one feel a little less comfortable about entering the place. You've earned your own living since you were fifteen and also managed to take a Master's Degree and go on to study at the Richmond School of Social Work. How did you manage it?

TYRE: It was simple enough. I finished high school when I was fifteen and then I got a job typing and running errands. Then I got a job with *Pictorial Review,* a magazine long ago discontinued. Young men went around soliciting subscriptions and told housewives they were earning their way through college—this was perfectly true. They brought the subscription forms to the office and I sent out bills. After a few months I got a job with a paint company and began to go to night school for an A.B. Millions of people are doing this now, but not so many did it then. By the time I had an A.B. I'd saved enough money to take time off from work to get a Master's Degree.

I was a day student and was terrified by the professors and the head librarian seemed always to be saying ssshh. I wrote papers —themes, I suppose they are called—on subjects I'm sure English majors have always written about. Roger Ascham's *Scholmaster,* Dorothy Wordsworth's letters, and Burton's *Anatomy of Melan-*

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choly. My thesis was on the works of Mrs. Gaskell. I'm sure you know her biography of Charlotte Bronte. I believed every word of it because I was so fond of Mrs. Gaskell. But later I learned she rather maligned Mr. Bronte, Charlotte's father. He was in many ways a dear man. Imagine having all those little geniuses under foot night and day.

EQMN: Did your life change much after your M.A.?

TYRE: After I got the M.A. the only job I could find was a temporary one typing up figures in a bank. I've never been quite sure what the figures were. Anyway, one day a call came for me at the bank and I was offered a job with the local welfare department. We were both desperate—they for anybody at all and I for something that wasn't temporary.

Several years later I took some time off for summer courses in social work. I stayed on for other courses during the regular academic year and also did some teaching. I was given the title of Lecturer. It sounded rather grand but I soon learned that it's even lower than being an Instructor.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Evan Hunter and Dennis Lynds are two of the most prolific popular fiction writers of recent years, and if neither has employed as many pseudonyms as the late John Creasey, each would rank fairly high in the byline stakes. Hunter has been known as Richard Marsten, Curt Cannon, Ezra Hannon, and Hunt Collins. Lynds has used the aliases William Arden, John Crowe, Carl Dekker, and Mark Sadler, as well as such house names as Nick Carter, Maxwell Grant, and (in magazine stories) Brett Halliday. Both writers have new novels under the names that most critics believe represent their best work in the mystery field, Hunter as Ed McBain and Lynds as Michael Collins.

**** Ed McBain: *Ice*, Arbor House, $15.50. The latest 87th Precinct novel is one of the longest in the series and also one of the best. It involves three seemingly unrelated murders (of a drug pusher, a musical-comedy dancer, and a diamond dealer) all committed with the same gun. McBain draws criminals (new) and cops (familiar) with equal skill. This major series has lost none of its freshness and power since the first 87th novel was published as a paperback original in 1956. Puzzle for readers: how many meanings, literal or metaphorical, does the title have?

**** Michael Collins: *Freak*, Dodd, Mead, $10.95. Though other private eyes have received more publicity, one-armed Dan Fortune

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ranks very near the top among the current crop. Back in his familiar New York habitat, with side trips to New Jersey and New Mexico, Fortune looks for the missing son and daughter-in-law of the unlikeable head of a small computer company. Like Ross Macdonald (and unlike some others), Lynds/Collins can write vivid prose and dialogue *and* plot a mystery.

*** Gerald Hammond: *The Game,* St. Martin's, $10.95. Scottish gunsmith Keith Calder, an adept if somewhat reluctant sleuth, is asked by his partner to determine if murder took place in a high-class brothel, where no body is present, but a bullet from an antique pistol has been found embedded in a chair. The tantalizing situation leads to some physical detection à la Dr. Thorndyke, and the whole complicated tale is presented with wit, style, and pace.

*** Phyllis A. Whitney: *Emerald,* Doubleday, $14.95. The latest from a completely reliable fashioner of romantic suspense is set in a well realized Palm Springs and involves both the afterglow of Forties movie glamor and the contemporary phenomenon of parental child-snatching. The final twist is so surprising, and yet so well prepared for, that most readers will grant the measure of artistic license necessary to believe it.

** Valerie Miner: *Murder in the English Department,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Nan Weaver, assistant professor of English at the University of California, is a likeable character, and this is a well written novel. But it is *not* a mystery or detective story despite the presence of many of the props, and as a feminist novel it has the usual faults of didactic, overtly political fiction, a drawback that will be more or less crucial depending on how much the reader agrees with Miner's views.

** Mel Arrighi: *Alter Ego,* St. Martin's, $11.95. Mystery writer Hank Mercer resents his successful tough private eye Biff Deegan and wants to transfer his allegiance to smooth philovancical sleuth Amos Frisby. But Biff keeps materializing to get Hank out of trouble. This is a lightweight, fast-reading novel with pale plot echoes (not unacknowledged) of *The Maltese Falcon.* For me anyway, the gimmick lacks charm.

Arthur W. Upfield's *The House of Cain,* a rare early novel by the author of the celebrated Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte series, was first published in the United States in 1929 by the "vanity press" firm of Dorrance and Company. (Another of this publisher's contributions to the literature of crime was the memoirs of Harry K. Thaw.) It is a book that must be met halfway. The florid, often sentimental style of the prose and dialogue suggests the 1880s more than the 1920s. The first few chapters, set in Melbourne, appear to be heading toward a traditional pure detective story, but suddenly (following a half hearted solution to a semi-locked-room mystery) it turns into a quite different and much more interesting adventure thriller about an eccentric American millionaire's isolated home for murderers. Once Upfield gets the story into the

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Australian Outback, there are occasional glimpses of the powerful and original writer he would become. Even though he's not in the book, every fan of Bony will want to read this early Upfield item, whatever the label—collector's item, museum piece, or neglected classic. The book includes an Introduction by Philip José Farmer. Publisher of the handsome new edition, priced at $20.00 postpaid, is Dennis McMillan. See Crime Beat for further information.

Another Melbourne-based mystery novel is also available in a new reprint edition. Fergus Hume's 1886 bestseller *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (Dover, $4.00) has received bad notices from many historians of the mystery, but as Julian Symons points out in *Mortal Consequences*, it is a much better book than generally reputed, still highly readable (no more old-fashioned in style than the Upfield), and rich in underworld atmosphere.

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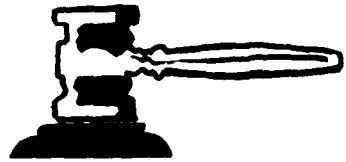

DETECTIVERSE

ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

by HARRY HARDING

In Chapter 1 I met the victim,
Although I didn't know it yet.
He was busy doing shady things
I knew he might regret.

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In Chapter 2 there were others
Who entered on the scene;
Some were friends, some enemies,
And some were in between.

In Chapter 3 a shot rang out;
The butler found him dead—
He was sitting in his study
With a bullet in his head.

In Chapter 4 the Inspector came,
With several men in blue;
But their searches and their questions
Turned not a single clue.

Through Chapter 5 and 6 and 7
Routine police work filled the time.
While they looked for other suspects,
I knew the butler did the crime.

In Chapter 8 they got a break—
The wife caught in a lie.
It was clear to me *she* killed him,
Since she had no alibi.

In Chapter 9 the wife was cleared
And now I was confused.
The police could find no murderer,
Or the weapon he had used.

In Chapter 10 they found the gun,
Just where the killer hid it
And the Inspector proved beyond a doubt—
I was right—the butler did it.

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"Q"

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You never got any older once you were dead . . .

ALWAYS IN SEASON

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Ford reacted patiently, while wondering whether that wasn't suspicious in itself. "D'you mean I can't buy it, Arnie, or what?"

Arnie Klahmeyer's weak chin set stubbornly though briefly. "Don't be that way. I never said I wouldn't sell it. All I did say was the truth—you've got no experience, and the season's still two or three months away. What's the rush?"

Avoiding a direct answer, Ford chuckled. "Then I'll find something that's always in season, right?" Klahmeyer shrugged defeatedly, refusing to mirror his customer's grin, and swung away to the cash register.

Ford sighed. Years before, when he and Cap Morley were launching the company, Ford had worried about being too handsome. It wasn't vanity. As a young man, women had paid him almost comically overt attention and there'd been several vague offers of screen tests when he and Cap were working their way through college.

He'd welcomed the grey staining still-thick hair, the stealthy growth of wrinkles and pouches, because they turned him into a personable but unthreatening man. That and rueful charm had won him many friends in town. But the charm wasn't working on Arnie Klahmeyer. Well, tough—and damn him.

Ford went out to the car, the long package awkward, rattling as he dropped it on the back seat. How many times had he walked out of a store, somewhere in the world, having bought a gift for Vicki? Take twelve years and multiply by twelve, at least. If he had a hundred dollars for each occasion, he'd be rich.

Sighing again, Ford reminded himself he was rich. And it didn't mean a thing. Suddenly he wanted to be young again, and uncannily good-looking. He would gladly time-travel back to his youth just to

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abolish the passing of years that were like a wasting disease, changing everything, always victorious.

He blinked, realizing he'd been sitting in the car for minutes, the ignition key poised near the slot. He'd been doing a lot of that in the past three weeks, dropping into a sort of partial trance. Ever since Doc Harrow had broken the news about Vicki.

With something between a curse and a groan, he powered away from the curb, earning horn blasts for his stupidity.

She was a tall, lithe woman, perhaps a shade too thin, with hair the color of cigarette ash or tarnished silver, not beautiful, nor even pretty by conventional yardsticks. Her eyes could have been larger, her front teeth smaller—a whole catalog of her flaws by paradox added up to fascination.

Ford padded across the kitchen and kissed her neck. "Listen, my wife's around somewhere, so we'll have to work fast. Wanna fool around?"

Vicki touched a hot spoon to the back of one invading hand, making him gasp. "*I'm* your wife, you animal." She twisted around to kiss him.

Preserving his mask, Ford marveled that he could detect no change in her. Doc Harrow had been categorical and he was a narrowly precise man, unsloppy as his own surgical instruments, but there was no sign of change in Vicki's smile, nor the vital energy she radiated.

"What's the matter?"

"Everything." He mimed a slump of utter depression. "I've got to go to Denver again. Tomorrow. For at least a week."

Vicki, refusing to play along, released a sharp sigh of irritation. "Not again! Much more of this and I'll be hiring a private eye. Are you sure you don't have a mistress?"

"Very sure." Horrified at the break in his voice, Ford coughed, cleared his throat, coughed again, and pounded his chest. You're hamming it up, warned a cold voice in his head. But Vicki was back at her cooking.

In the living room, Ford found himself staring at a bottle and a glass, trying to puzzle out what they were for. "Make me one too," she called. "It must be that time."

"Coming up." Shards of glass on the cabinet, black exclamation

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marks on the carpet. For a moment his hands had betrayed him, the neck of the bottle clubbing the rim of the tumbler.

"Sit down, I'll clean that up." She led him to the couch. "Bad day?"

"I've had better." Ford eased out of his shoes. "No, it's just—I'm getting old, Vic."

"I forbid you to talk like that." Their age difference had always worried him. His mouth twisted sourly. Academic now. You never got any older once you were dead. She would always be thirty-six even if he lived to see the century out.

Forcing a smile, he said, "I thought of asking Cap to fall by and eat with us."

Her tone was dry and challenging. "Make that a passing thought. Come on, darling, you see Morley every working day. I've heard of bringing work home from the office, but that's ridiculous."

She still refused to use Cap's name. He was always Morley—a flat, dismissive, distancing label. She tried to pass it off as an affectation, a nickname like the one Cap had gained in college—nothing to do with sport, he'd starred in a campus staging of *Captains Courageous*—but that didn't fool any of the three of them.

Ford had always assumed that the hostility sprang from jealousy. He and Cap had been as close as men can be without a sexual dimension. College, the service, then the long battle to make the business pan out. Most lovers have an illogical spark of resentment for people who have known their idol longer, better, differently. And he and Vicki were deeply in love— He shut his eyes, willing the train of thought to end.

"Okay," Ford agreed, "I'll leave earlier and talk to Cap before I got to the airport."

"Better," said Vicki. Satisfied with her drying of the carpet, she sat back on her heels, squinting up at him through a fallen veil of hair. There was a violet shadow in the cleft of her bosom. Ford was swept by a sense of loss and rage.

"Headache," he explained, as her expression changed. "I'll be right back—"

Running cold water, dipping his burning face in its chill, he ordered himself to have control.

Doc Harrow might have been precise and certain, but he could also be mistaken. Time would tell. Ford gave himself a bleak look in the mirror above the basin. That at least was true, something he

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need not take on trust. For obvious reasons, he'd soon find out for himself.

They were a pair of good actors, but tension and constraint were no less potent for being denied. So they drank too much and Ford woke at one in the morning with a stiff neck and Vicki's head on his shoulder. She roused as he tried to slide off the couch and he kissed the top of her head, fine strands of her hair grainy as sand against his lips. "I'll zonk out in the den," he mumbled, "no sense in waking you at crack of dawn."

"Like hell you will, I'm a sexy old broad and I do not sleep alone."

Tears scalded his eyelids. She had always loved talking that way, privately.

"Sure you are," he jeered, his heart a cinder. "Easiest make between here and Frisco, correct?"

Unsteady with tiredness as much as drink, Vicki ran a palm across his chest. "You'd know, mister."

Toward dawn, sleep-sodden, she turned to hold him, her thin arms surprisingly strong. "Oh, Steve—" A little-girl wail, but the kiss was adult, hotly hungry, explicit.

Afterward, Ford lay staring at the gradually emerging pattern of the room they had shared for more than a decade. Shiny snail tracks of tears made leaf-vein patterns on his cheeks. Vicki's circulation was poor—he'd often joked that he had to be successful just to keep pace with the heating bills—but her husband was deathly cold.

Engines gobbling air and spitting fire, the plane hurtled up the invisible switchback to gain altitude before crossing the city. From the ground, its roar was no more than the distant nag of a fly trapped behind glass. But it wasn't Ford's plane, just the flight he was supposed to be aboard.

Prone beneath the pines, he studied the ground. It was years since he'd used a hunting rifle, but something told him the old skills remained. Certainly telescopic sights had improved. He was a hundred yards from the parking lot and could make out the shape of individual pellets of gravel on the rough surface.

His hunch was that they'd choose the motel cabin nearest the trees and thus farthest from the reception block. Though he could cover the entire range of cabins from this knoll just beyond the fence.

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And of course they wouldn't be arriving because— He ran out of reasons as soon as he tried to find them.

Doc Harrow was a bitter man, not a nice man, and unfortunately he'd been very drunk at the last party. Messily divorced, and hurting from it—that was why they'd asked him over. They didn't even like the old bastard.

Years younger than me, Ford corrected himself abstractedly. Strange, the way one froze at a certain age and stayed there. Ford always felt himself to be about thirty-six, the same as Vicki. Only he wasn't.

"Listen," Doc Harrow had slurred, "I had a long summer of folks sniggering behind my back and me being the last to know. Can you get behind that?"

Ford was driving him home at the time. He'd made a formless noise, unable to answer.

"And I won't see it happen to you. Okay, you'll hate me, but at least you won't be the last to know. I had an emergency out on the Sawtooths Highway two weeks back. That crummy motel, the manager keeled over, food-poisoning. It doesn't signify, but the point is I was there. And so was Vicki. Her car, her writing in the register, *not* her name. Word to the wise, pal. Don't be the last to know."

Ford started at the spit and rasp of gravel as a car pulled up outside the nearest cabin. Then another. Slam of doors, scrape of feet, Vicki throwing herself into the man's arms.

Steve, she had said.

Ford's name wasn't Steve.

That was Cap Morley's name, the one none of his friends or colleagues ever used. They hardly knew it.

George Ford yelled the hated name and fired twice. He kept shouting it.

The echoes stopped and the birds quietened, returning to the pines and the roofs of the cabins. Then there was a third, final shot, and the name was heard no more.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

PETER LOVESEY

"My school has a Jersey herd and twelve acres put out to wheat and barley. The girls do all the work. It's not just skipping and dancing. So it follows," Alison said with a level look at Tom, "that bulls don't impress me overmuch . . ."

THE VIRGOAN AND THE TAUREAN

by PETER LOVESEY

She was the daughter of the vicar and he was the publican's son. She had been sent into the vicarage garden to pick greengages for the jam her mother always made in the last week of August. Alison was seventeen, with fine flaxen hair, the envy of every girl in the village. She dressed plainly and she had no use for makeup, yet there was not a man in Middle Slaughter whose thoughts had not been disturbed by her.

Shyly, she pretended not to notice the bare-chested farm worker repairing the stone wall in the field adjoining the garden. Tom Hunt had not impressed her in the least when they had been at school together. Large, rough, and rebellious, he had ruled the playground by sheer tyranny. She had been pleased to forget him when she had transferred to boarding school. The bullying in a school for girls was of a different order from his brutish behavior. He had become as unreal as the ogres in the storybooks she had left behind on her bedroom shelf.

His work on the wall brought him to a point where the greengage tree overhung the field. Alison moved around the trunk so she wouldn't be forced to catch his eye.

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He was not to be ignored. A large ripe greengage landed neatly in the basket she was using. She heard him say, "Funny how the best ones are always out of reach."

She made no response.

"I mean the plums, of course. Remember me, Alison?" He sat astride the wall where she could not fail to see his grinning features and bare brown torso. He had the physique of a man now, a strong, broad man, but she recognized his smile.

She said, "Tom Hunt. You used to chase the girls with nettles and sting their legs."

He laughed. "I've given it up now."

It was strange to trace the obnoxious features of six years ago in this undeniably good-looking face.

At the church fete the following Sunday he helped her sell programs at the gate. He seemed popular with the villagers, even the girls and boys he had once persecuted shamefully.

That evening there was a barn dance in aid of parish funds. As soon as Alison appeared with her father, Tom Hunt crossed the floor and asked her to join him in a St. Bernard's Waltz.

"That's the way I do things," he told her as they linked arms. "Straight to it, like a bull at a gate. I don't stand on ceremony."

"And you'd better not stand on my feet," she said as their shoes touched. "Haven't you danced a St. Bernard's before?"

"Not very often. Have you? You seem to know the steps."

"Yes."

"Where did you learn—at school?"

She gave a nod. She didn't like being reminded that she was still a schoolgirl.

"I thought so," Tom said with a trace of condescension. "Girls' schools do a lot of that, don't they? Singing and dancing and skipping."

"They do other things too," Alison pointed out.

"Cookery?"

"Farming. My school has a Jersey herd and twelve acres put out to wheat and barley. The girls do all the work. It's not just skipping and dancing. So it follows," she said with a level look at Tom, "that bulls don't impress me overmuch."

Against all the indications, the friendship between them took root. They were seen together hand-in-hand walking the lanes and footpaths around the village each evening after work until it got dark.

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Then Tom would escort her to the vicarage porch and kiss her briefly before making his way, whistling, to the Harrow. There, over his beer, he would shrug aside the good-natured banter of the regulars, the inquiries after the vicar's health and whether Tom proposed to join the chair. Any young man who courted a village girl was a target for the locals' wit. The wooing of the vicar's daughter was better than a game of darts.

The baiting of Tom was rendered more entertaining by the knowledge that not many months before it would have roused him to violence. Perhaps it was the onset of maturity, or perhaps it was the fact that his father was landlord of the Harrow that kept Tom in check. He managed to accept the chaffing in good sport, which of course was demanded by the time-honored ritual. He even summoned an occasional smile.

On some evenings Rufus Peel added his comments to the rest. Rufus was the only one of the regulars capable of rankling Tom. He was of Tom's generation. He had been the star pupil in the village school, the boy who had played Joseph in the nativity play to Alison's Mary, when Tom had not even aspired to the part of third shepherd. At secondary school, Rufus had collected every honor possible. The head had chosen him for school captain. He had become the first Middle Slaughter boy ever to win a place at agricultural college. Now he was regarded with awe. He treated the older men like contemporaries, and they accepted it. His middle-aged manner and short, portly stature undoubtedly helped, as did the rounds he bought in the Harrow. His grant was topped up with a sponsorship from the fertilizer industry.

When Rufus joined in the wisecracks at Tom's expense, there was a cutting edge to his comments calculated to test the victim's passivity to the limit. "Tom's no fool," he told the others. "He's after a cheap wedding. There'll be no church fees, you see. It's all on the Lord if you're smart enough to marry a vicar's daughter."

Tom tried to ignore the remarks. He knew what lay behind them. Rufus had wanted Alison for years. He had pestered her for friendship ever since they were in junior school. He had passed notes to her and tried to arrange meetings. He had thought at first that she would be flattered by his interest. Each success in his life—the biology prize, the commission in the CCF, the school captaincy—had cued another bid for Alison's approval.

Alison had lately described to Tom how difficult her life had become through Rufus's persistence. She had treated him politely, but

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coolly. In reality she disliked everything about him. But Rufus had refused to give up.

One Saturday in May Alison had been playing tennis at school when she had noticed a persistent giggling from the benches by the sidelines. Along one side of the courts was a beech hedge, intended to isolate the daughters of the clergy from the pernicious world at large. The smaller girls had spotted a young man peering through a gap in the hedge: Rufus. He had cycled sixty miles to let Alison know that he had won a place in agricultural college. Burning with embarrassment and with the second-formers tittering in chorus, Alison had approached the gap, lowered her head, and listened to Rufus's jubilant announcement. She had stared at the ridiculous, smug face framed by the beech leaves and she had told Rufus that she was glad he would be going to agricultural college, and she hoped it was as far away as possible. They had not spoken since.

The summer passed. In September Rufus went off to college in a dark-blue suit and a striped scarf and Alison started her last year at boarding school. Tom stayed in Middle Slaughter and helped burn the stubble on Hopkin's Farm. In the next few weeks, he wrote a few letters to Alison, but he had difficulty in expressing himself in words.

When she came home for Christmas he met the train. They went for long walks on the frost-white footpaths. They always parted at the vicarage porch with a short embrace and a token kiss. Alison was very proper. Tom had more than once invited her home, but she had resolutely declined. The reason was that his home was the Harrow and her father would be shocked if she set foot in a public house. She told Tom, "I'll be eighteen next holiday, and then my father says I can make my own decisions. Let's wait till then."

So the next vacation, on the Friday after Easter, the day arrived when Tom treated Alison to her first drink in the Harrow. She secretly dreaded the amusement it would give the regulars, but as it turned out her appearance caused no comment at all, for there was a bigger diversion. There were strangers in the Harrow.

They were a couple from London on their way, as the man explained with a wink, to spend the weekend at a cottage in Wales. He was a freelance journalist, a fluent, amusing talker who was soon entertaining the entire clientele with stories of famous people whose secrets he had somehow uncovered. He had one of those prodigious moustaches once known as "RAF," though he belonged to

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a later generation. He smoked cigars and claimed to have rubbed shoulders with everyone of note in London. A cynic quietly remarked that if his suit was anything to go by, he was telling the truth.

If either of them had money, it was she. Her sable jacket was the real thing and so were the diamond and ruby rings. She had blonde hair worn long, with silver highlights. She wore a musky perfume that penetrated the cigar fumes. She might have been thirty-nine: forty was unthinkable. The thoughts that were abroad in the Harrow that night were tinged with envy of her weekend companion.

He emptied his glass. "Not a bad beer. Not bad at all."

"Have another," offered Rufus, back from college with some of his grant unspent.

"That's very decent of you. The lady's is a Pym's."

"I don't think I'd better, Charlie," said the woman.

"Of course you will. I'll drive the rest of the way. I'm steady as a rock if I stay on beer." Charlie turned to Rufus. "You take the order, old chum, and I'll collect the empties."

Rufus had clearly not intended to buy drinks for everyone, but that was what happened. The regulars chanted their orders with the familiarity of monks at prayer.

While the order was being set up, the man called Charlie said confidentially to Rufus, "You know who she is, of course?"

"Who do you mean?"

"My traveling companion—who else?"

Rufus shook his head. "Should I know her?"

Charlie nodded. "You've seen her picture plenty of times. Come on, you recognize her."

Rufus gave the woman another look. "I'm sorry. I'm damned sure I don't."

Charlie looked as if he had taken offense. "She's famous, man."

"I'm a student at college," said Rufus in his defense. "I don't watch the telly."

"You read the papers, don't you?"

"She's not a politician?"

"Does she look like one? Which paper do you read?"

"The *Chronicle*."

"I thought so. You really ought to know her."

"Well, there's something familiar, I admit," lied Rufus.

Charlie addressed the room in general. "Anyone got a copy of the *Chronicle?*"

On the window-seat to the right of the door, Tom and Alison were

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drinking white wine, grateful for the attention the strangers were getting. Nobody had passed a comment yet about Alison's presence.

Tom's father, the landlord, retrieved a copy of the *Chronicle* from under the counter and handed it to Charlie, who passed it to Rufus. The mystery of the woman's identity was now the focus of every person present.

"Turn to the center pages, lad," instructed Charlie. "Now turn over again. What do you find?"

"Letters to the Editor," Rufus read aloud. "Your Stars Today. Well, I'll be damned!" He stared at the page and across the room at the woman. Her large brown eyes returned his gaze without self-consciousness. She was used to being pointed out as a celebrity. "Deborah Kristal!" said Rufus. "The fortune-teller."

"Don't call her that, for heaven's sake," said Charlie between his teeth. "She's not some gypsy at the Derby with a crystal ball. She's an astrologist, and she takes it very seriously. It's highly technical. They use computers these days." He picked up a tray of drinks and carried it across the room. "Anyone had a birthday lately?"

The question produced a sudden silence in the room.

In the window-seat, Alison whispered urgently to Tom, "Take me home now." They got up to leave.

Charlie turned back to Rufus. "Never mind. What's your birth month, old boy?"

Desperate to escape the spotlight, Rufus had an inspiration. "It's Alison's birthday today. Her eighteenth!"

"Marvelous!" said Charlie. "Come over here, my dear, and Miss Kristal will tell you what the future holds."

"No, thank you," said Alison quickly.

"She's the vicar's daughter," someone explained. "She's shy, poor child. She's had a very sheltered life."

"Do it for both of 'em, then," Tom's father suggested. "My Tom isn't bashful."

"What a splendid idea," said Rufus at once. "Cast their horoscopes and tell them if they have any future together."

"I'd need more information," said Miss Kristal. "I don't have my charts with me. I can only make a few broad observations."

"Tom was born on the twenty-eighth of August," said his father.

"In that case, he's not afraid of a good day's work," said Miss Kristal. "He's healthy and strong, loyal and courageous. He does nothing by halves. He knows what he wants out of life and he'll move mountains to get it. His manner may be a shade overbearing

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at times, but he hides nothing from the world. He's an honest, open-hearted man."

"Tom, I'd like to leave," said Alison for the second time, but Tom lingered by the door, too interested to move.

"The young lady has positive qualities too," went on Miss Kristal. "She has the highest standards and she expects others to conform to them."

"That's true," said Tom. "It's absolutely true!"

"She has exceptional powers of concentration," said Miss Kristal. "She is not easily deceived. But when she gives her word, she means it."

"What about the future?" asked Tom's father. "Would you advise them to get hitched?"

"Dad!" said Tom in embarrassment.

There was a pause.

"I would rather not say," said Miss Kristal. "Charlie, it's getting late. We still have a long way to drive."

Rufus had been listening intently. The answer had not satisfied him. "But you must have *some* idea whether he is suited to her."

"In general," said Miss Kristal, choosing her words with care, "I would not recommend a partnership between a Virgoan and a Taurean."

"A what?" said Tom's father.

"A Virgoan and a Taurean. Virgo and Taurus are the virgin and the bull."

"The virgin and the bull! I like that!" said Charlie.

"It's laughable," said Rufus with a sneer.

"What do you mean?" demanded Tom in a spasm of anger. "What's there to laugh about?"

"It's so ridiculous," Rufus answered insensitively. "The virgin and the bull. It's a joke. It's got to be a joke!"

Rufus had scarcely spoken before Tom was across the floor and gripping him by the shirtfront. "What are you getting at, you louse?"

"Tom!" ordered his father. "Take your hands off him! I want no violence here!"

"He's going to take back every word," said Tom, tightening his grip. "He insulted Alison. She's not like that. She's decent."

Rufus hissed at Tom, "Is that what you think, or what she told you?"

Behind Tom, Alison gave a whimper of distress and ran from the pub.

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Tom brought back his fist to strike Rufus, but his arm was seized from behind and forced against his back in a savage half nelson. "There'll be no brawling in this house," his father's voice snarled in his ear. "Not from my own son, or anybody. You're going out to cool off."

Tom was strongly built, yet in that grip he could do nothing to prevent his father marching him to the door and thrusting him outside. It was debatable whether the father or the son suffered the greater humiliation.

The subdued atmosphere in the Harrow lasted only a short time. At Charlie's prompting, Miss Kristal obligingly cast more horoscopes. Rufus, who had two quick double brandies and left early, was one of the few who professed to be uninterested in knowing the future. As events turned out, this proved a fatal error, because he never reached home that night.

It was morning before his disappearance was reported by his parents. The overnight absence from home of a young man in his late teens is not usually treated by the police as a matter of grave concern. Yet in this case it was difficult to understand what might have happened. It was established that Rufus had left the Harrow soon after 9:45 P.M. He would have taken some twenty minutes to walk the mile and a quarter along the Harford Road. It was a minor road that eventually linked with the A436, and it would have led him past a couple of cottages and Hopkin's Farm. A search of the road, ditches, and adjoining fields yielded no clue.

The inquiries were concentrated on the incident in the Harrow. Everyone present was questioned except Miss Kristal and her companion, Charlie, who had left in their Alfa-Romeo about 10:00 P.M. As they had driven along the Harford Road, it was possible that they'd have passed Rufus, but no one knew where to trace them in Wales, not even Miss Kristal's newspaper office. It seemed that Miss Kristal had anticipated a longish absence, because before leaving Fleet Street she had filed Your Stars Today for the next four weeks.

Tom and his father were questioned closely. Tom stated that after his father had ejected him, he ran after Alison and escorted her home. The vicarage was in the opposite direction from Rufus's route. Alison corroborated what Tom had said.

A theory was advanced in the village that the journalist, Charlie, well over the limit by the time he had left the Harrow with Miss Kristal and taken the wheel of the Alfa-Romeo, had run Rufus down

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and killed him, then taken fright and bundled the body into the boot of the car and disposed of it in some remote lake in Wales. But at the end of the month Charlie and Miss Kristal were traced by the police, and the car was examined by forensic experts. There was no evidence to support the theory. The couple claimed that they had no recollection of having seen Rufus or anyone else on the Harford Road after they left the Harrow.

So Rufus Peel was listed as a missing person, one of the thousands on the police computer.

For two years there were no developments in the case. Tom and Alison were married in the village church and the reception was held at the Harrow. Then, within a fortnight of the wedding, the remains of Rufus were discovered at the bottom of a septic tank on Hopkin's Farm.

The autopsy revealed that he had died violently. Both legs and one arm were shattered, the rib-cage had been crushed, the spinal column severed and the skull splintered. The Home Office pathologist stated his opinion that the multiple injuries had been caused by a heavy motor vehicle, probably a tractor. It was likely that the victim had been run over not once but repeatedly, as if deliberately.

The police picked up Tom and took him to Gloucester for questioning. After several hours he made a confession. He admitted having caused Rufus's death. He stated that on the night his father had ejected him from the Harrow he had not, as previously claimed, taken Alison home. He had made his way to the farm, sat in the seat of a tractor at the farm entrance and waited for Rufus to come along the road. His fury at what had happened in the Harrow, the slanderous insinuation Rufus had made about Alison in the public bar the first time she had ever set foot in the place, had turned him crazy for vengeance. He had driven the tractor straight at Rufus and felled him. He had driven over him and then reversed the tractor and crushed the body again. He had dragged it into the yard and disposed of it in the tank.

At the assizes, Tom pleaded guilty to murder. In sentencing him, the judge allowed that there had been strong provocation, but ruled that the interval between the provocation and the crime did not allow sufficient grounds for a verdict of manslaughter. Tom was given a life sentence.

In Middle Slaughter there was strong sympathy for Tom. When he was released on parole after serving eleven years, he was given

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back his job on Hopkin's Farm. He lived there in a tied cottage with Alison, who had waited loyally for him to serve his sentence. The villagers still spoke of them as the virgin and the bull.

One lunchtime shortly after Tom's release, Deborah Kristal chanced to meet Charlie in a Fleet Street wine bar. The conversation got 'round to Middle Slaughter. "I thought I might go down there again," said Charlie. "Care to join me, sweetie? Another cosy weekend in Wales?"

"Using my car, I suppose? No thank you, Charlie. Nothing personal, just the price of petrol. What do you want to go to Middle Slaughter for?"

"Tom Hunt's out. I thought of offering the poor devil something for his story. It's worth another airing in the Sundays. It made a big enough impact when it happened."

"I shouldn't if I were you," said Miss Kristal.

"I'll be all right, my love. He had no grudge against me. I won't antagonize the fellow."

"It's a waste of time going," said Miss Kristal emphatically. "He won't tell you a thing."

But Charlie would not be dissuaded. He drove down to Middle Slaughter alone the following weekend.

"Sometimes I think you really are clairvoyant," he told Deborah Kristal the next time they met. "Ruddy fellow clammed up completely. Wouldn't say a word. And nor would anyone else in the village. His father still runs the pub, and he's no help. Nor are his customers. I spent a fortune at the bar trying to coax something out of 'em."

"I did warn you."

"How did you know I was wasting my time?"

"Because they don't want the story opened up again. It was full of holes when he made the confession."

Charlie's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Tom didn't kill Rufus Peel. A man as strong and as angry as he was didn't need to lie in wait with a tractor. He could have strangled Rufus with his bare hands."

"But he confessed, for heaven's sake!"

Miss Kristal shook her head. "For *Alison's* sake, darling. She was the killer of Rufus Peel. Everyone in that village knows it, but no one will say a thing. Nor will you if you've any romance in you at all."

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Charlie, wide-eyed, said, "Are you seriously telling me that an eighteen-year-old girl murdered a man by driving a tractor at him? A vicar's daughter? She wouldn't know the front of a tractor from the back!"

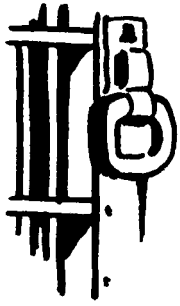
"Wrong. I went to see the school she attended. A boarding school for daughters of the clergy. They believe in self-sufficiency. Every girl is taught to plough on the school farm."

"You checked on this? You're a dark horse, darling. Why on earth would she have wanted to kill Rufus?"

"Really, Charlie, if you can't see that, you'll never understand the way a woman thinks. Alison was enraged by what Rufus insinuated in the Harrow. He slandered her reputation in front of her prospective husband and father-in-law and most of the village. Instead of going home, she went to the farm and took out a tractor and took her revenge when Rufus came along the road. My guess is that Tom turned up later and helped her hide the body. When it was found, he made the false confession to save her."

"What a story!" said Charlie wistfully. "His heroic sacrifice for her act of violence. Is it really possible?"

"It was in the stars," said Miss Kristal with logic in her voice. "You see, he was the virgin and she was the bull."



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a *NEW* Scrib Merlin story by

RON GOULART

Scrib, who had written most of the Pizza Ona Stik TV commercials Chef Pastore had appeared in, just happened to be in the model kitchen on the Gourmet Floor of Mitgang's Mammoth Store when the chef was stabbed, just happened to be the recipient of his dying message . . .

SIX TABLESPOONS MOLASSES

by RON GOULART

He heard the pots and pans falling first, then the screams. A thumping thud came next and more screams.

Anxious to get out of the big department store, Scrib Merlin had almost passed the commotion by. But when he'd glanced in its direction, he'd seen a crisp white chef's hat go rising up above the heads of the gawking customers here on the Gourmet Floor of Mitgang's Mammoth Store. The hat had apparently popped free of the head of whoever'd taken that rattling fall. That aroused Scrib's curiosity.

He pushed his way through the startled, whispering, murmuring patrons who surrounded the Model Kitchen Korner.

"Awful, awful," a plump woman was remarking. "And so typically New York."

"I was thinking of buying a set of those very knives."

"Don't look, Kevin."

A plump man was sprawled face down on the almost spotless white floor. About fifty-five, he was wearing a white chef's jacket and there was a wooden-handled carving knife planted deep in his lower back. The price-tag still dangled from the polished handle, like a tiny flag of surrender. The cloth around the blade's entry point was a soggy

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red. Blurry dots of blood led from the fallen body to the half-open doorway at the rear of the three-walled room.

"Kevin, it's not something to laugh at. Behave now."

Scrib recognized the dying man. "Chef Pastore," he said aloud, nudging free of the growing crowd. Although he'd worked with him several times over the past three years, Scrib wasn't sure what his first name was. Everybody always called him Chef.

"Chef?" Kneeling next to him, avoiding a smear of fresh blood, Scrib took hold of his plump hand.

"Who? . . ."

"It's me, Chef, Scrib Merlin. You know, I'm a copywriter with Amthrax & Associates here in Manhattan. I wrote most of the Pizza Ona Stik TV commercials you've been in."

After groaning, the chef, with great effort, lifted his head and gazed up at Scrib. "Sure . . . my friend, Scrib. How you doing, Scrib?"

"I'm okay, but you—"

"I'm dying . . . and this isn't what I planned. I used to be big time. My cooking show on TV. Not just a chef at a cut-rate hotel then but a big person—somebody. Didn't have to moonlight and do cheap commercials. Meaning no offense . . ."

"Listen, Chef, tell me who knifed you," urged Scrib. He glanced up at the surrounding crowd. "Did somebody send for a doctor?"

"Aren't you a doctor?"

"Scrib . . . I was almost on top again . . . was going to have money . . ."

"But who stabbed— What kind of money?" Scrib moved his head close to that of the dying chef.

"This isn't what we anticipated. No, not at all." A lean man in a sedate grey suit had come fluttering up to the edge of the model kitchen. "The chef is supposed to be over in the model dining room demonstrating how to make canapes out of leftovers. Young man, what exactly are you—"

"Hush," advised Scrib. "Go ahead, Chef."

"You a nice boy, Scrib. Maybe you . . . get the money and don't mess up like me . . ." His plump face was turning to a strange white color and his words were thinning. "All you got to remember is . . . six tablespoons molasses . . ."

"Hum?"

"Six tablespoons molasses . . . and . . ." The words stopped coming. Chef Pastore's head twisted away from Scrib and dropped with a thump to the white floor.

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"This is terrible, absolutely," said the floor manager. "A man actually dying right smack in our model kitchen. With one of our knives sticking out of him. Dreadful."

"Stand aside, please. I'm Doctor Reisberson."

"Too late, Doc. The old man bought the farm."

"Kevin, be still."

Shaking his head, Scrib stood up and away from the dead man. He backed off, skirting the copper pans and skillets Chef Pastore must have knocked off the butcher-block table when he came staggering into the room.

Scrib looked at the doorway that probably led to an employees-only passway behind the model kitchen and the other displays. No use trying to poke around back there now, the killer was long gone—either out of Mitgang's already or lost in the hundreds of late-afternoon shoppers.

The chef had talked about money, presumably a lot of money. All Scrib had to do to get in on it was remember the words.

"Yow!" he said, suddenly and out loud. Someone had poked a finger in his back—at about the same spot the knife had gone into Chef Pastore.

"You really and truly do make a habit of this, don't you?" inquired the slim, pretty red-haired young woman who'd nudged him.

"Afternoon, Miss Cashin," he said without enthusiasm. "Habit of what?"

"Stumbling over dead men," said Molly J. Cashin. "From what I hear, corpses fall at your feet like rain in the Brazilian jungle."

"*Two* dead men," he said, holding up the appropriate number of fingers. "Two in five years. That sure as hell doesn't make me a dousing rod for defunct citizens. So don't go sounding like some bubbleheaded reporter from the *National Intruder* or—"

"Three," she corrected amiably. "This corpse today, poor Chef Pastore, that makes three. Doesn't it? You always seem to arrive on the scene just as some poor fellow of your aquaintance is breathing his—"

"Speaking of arriving on scenes, what are you doing here? The word at the agency today was you were felled with a bug."

"Do I look as though I have a bug running around inside me?" Molly asked, reaching into the canvas bag slung over her shoulder and fishing out a tiny square mirror. "I look, and if you weren't such an oaf you'd mention it, Merlin, pretty near terrific. I took the day off today to check on the Nolan Hosiery displays in various depart-

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ment stores and boutiques around Manhattan. That's my big account at Amthrax, after all." Flashing herself a smile in the mirror, she put it away. "I happen to be the Senior Account Ex on the Nolan account, even though I'm only twenty-seven."

Scrib, who was fast approaching thirty-four, said, "Right. And you make more money than I do. Due no doubt to your talent and not your terrific looks. Goodbye, Miss Cashin."

"Call me Molly."

"I'd just as well not."

"I know I've only been at the agency four months whereas you labored there several long weary years and—"

"Three and a half years isn't exactly—"

"I know you resent my meteoric rise," she continued. "Be that as it may, Merlin, I want you to call me Molly from hence on. We're going to be partners."

Scrib took an uneasy step back from her. "Partners in what?"

"Partners in finding all that money Chef Pastore just gave you the clue to," she answered, smiling up at him.

"Tell me about the first corpse you stumbled on," called Molly from the kitchen of her penthouse apartment.

Scrib, his hands in his pockets, was gazing down at the twilit Central Park far below. Tiny people were hurrying in and out of it and a few of them were traveling in tiny carriages drawn by tiny horses. "Nope, I don't talk about that."

"Well, then, the second one." She appeared in the doorway, a fresh white apron on over her dark skirt and yellow blouse. "You can come into the kitchen and talk to me while I'm fixing our dinner."

"I'm not particularly hungry or—"

"Surely seeing Chef Pastore expire didn't upset you? You should be used to—"

"Seeing three people die over a period of five years doesn't exactly qualify me to run for coroner."

"True, yet you have to admit you seem to have an affinity for being at the right place at the right time. Take the YoYo Hobbs Case last year, Merlin. You found his body, solved his murder, caused the demise of the killer, and—"

"And didn't make a penny. So there's no need for you to—"

"You didn't have me working with you then." Giving him a follow-me nod over her shoulder, she returned to the kitchen.

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Shrugging, Scrib followed. "You have an impressive apartment here."

"Family money. That's what pays for it, which is what you've probably been wondering." Molly stopped in front of the stove, resting her hands on her knees, and watched the three pots on the burners. "What do you know about Hungarian goulash?"

"I've eaten it."

Using a wooden spoon, she pointed at the pyrex pot nearest him. "Should it be doing that?"

The plastic cooking pouch had obviously sprung a leak and the ingredients were spinning and dancing all through the hot, bubbling water and staining it a deep orangish brown. "The sack's got a hole in it."

"Well, I know that. I poked it with the ice pick is why."

"On purpose?"

Straightening up, Molly said, "No, when I was chopping it free of the ice in the freezer compartment. I had the package stored for quite a while."

"We can send out for—"

"No, absolutely not. I like fixing meals. I don't get to do it half as often as I'd like. The noodles look okay, don't they?"

He scrutinized another bubbling pot. "They seem sort of limp."

"Noodles are supposed to be limp. Hence the expression, limp as a noodle."

"Not that limp."

Molly gave a short sigh. "While I'm doing the cooking, let's get to work solving the mystery."

"What's in the third pot, the one with the lid?"

"A surprise," she answered. "What form do you think the big money Chef Pastore alluded to is in?"

Scrib watched things bubble for a few seconds. "My past experience leads me to believe he was probably blackmailing somebody," he answered finally.

"Good, that makes sense." Molly nodded. "Now usually the Chef, who'd fallen from his former glory in recent years, worked in the kitchen at the Hotel Waterloo down at Twenty-second and Fifth Avenue. That's one of our Amthrax & Associates accounts, isn't it?"

"Yep, one I write copy for," he replied. "The Waterloo and the Dunkirk, the two hotels to think of when you want high-class accommodations and low low prices. A couple of fleabags, but a lot of bubbleheaded tourists seem to flock to them."

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"The chef, because of his background as a former well known television cooking-show host, also did commercials."

"That's how I got to know him, when he played a part in one of my Pizza Ona Stik spots. He had a pretty good singing voice, too, and we also used him on radio as a singing anchovy for—"

"The point I'm leading up to is, he knew you and trusted you."

"I'm basically a trustable person."

"I found out while you were chatting with the police that—"

"Chatting isn't the exact word. Grilling is more like what went on. They have the notion that because I happened to find a body in Central Park once and then, months later, happen to be in Mitgang's when—"

"Let's concentrate on the murder at hand and not get into your personal—"

"Being labled as another Jack the Ripper or Son of Sam doesn't exactly make me feel—"

"The police don't suspect you of being anything more than some kind of Jonah," she told him. "That cute Sergeant Hunsburger told me that while you were talking to the Eyewitness News girl with the wig."

"That's gratifying."

"Okay, Chef Pastore was working on a special one-day job at Mitgang's." Molly scratched her chin with the handle of the wooden spoon. "Obviously he made an appointment to meet someone behind the scenes and collect some money."

Scrib nodded. "There are a lot of little corridors and hallways behind those display rooms," he said. "The cops say they found blood in the passage just behind the kitchen where Chef Pastore collapsed. That must be where he met his killer."

"Only he didn't know it was a killer. He thought the gentleman was going to hand him some money."

Scrib leaned back against the sink and folded his arms. "We don't know for sure if it's a man or a woman."

"Yes, that's true. And a kitchen knife is a woman's weapon more or less."

"The killer had to bring those knives from a display several hundred feet away from where the killing took place," Scrib added. "Meaning he or she intended to use one and this wasn't a spur-of-the-moment thing."

After giving the disconnected goulash a tentative poke with her

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wooden spoon, Molly said, "Which brings us to the dying message. You have, so says rumor, a knack for working out this sort of thing."

"The other times," said Scrib, looking away from her, "the final words happened to be from old jokes. For a while there, it looked like every dying comedian in Manhattan was going to gasp out his last words to me. In this instance, though, Molly, the chef just muttered some gibberish about—"

"What specifically did he say? You can tell me." She held out her hand. "I know you're capable of solving this enigma and making us a lot of money. To show you my good faith, we'll split forty-sixty in your favor. A deal?"

He shook her hand. "It's a deal," he said. "But I really am unsure of what he was trying to convey. The important part, the message that's supposed to be the key, consists of three words. 'Six tablespoons molasses.' "

"Six tablespoons *molasses?*"

"Yep."

"So that's what he said. I wasn't quite close enough to catch it." She poked at the goulash once again. "Sometimes I wish I was a better cook, but when it comes to reading a recipe I—"

"Recipe!" exclaimed Scrib, straightening up. "Sure, of course. He was a chef, not a comic. He didn't tell jokes, he told recipes."

Molly was watching his face, a puzzled frown spreading. "Beg pardon?"

"Six tablespoons molasses," Scrib explained slowly and carefully. "That's the way you list ingredients in recipes. You know, three pounds bananas, two cups sugar, six tablespoons *molasses.*"

Molly laughed. "Great, you've solved it," she said. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "But maybe if we look through some cook books we—"

"I only have one, actually."

"That's a start. I'll run through the index and find all the recipes that call for molasses and then—"

"This one won't help much. It's the *Girl Guides Campfire Cook Book* and I don't recall we used much molasses when we were tramping in the—"

"That's all you have?"

"Mostly when I have lavish dinner parties like tonight, Scrib, I thaw things."

"We'll have to go to the nearest D. Trumbo Bookstore and—" He

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took a few steps toward the doorway, then halted. "Wait now. Chef Pastore wouldn't give me a tip out of just any cook book. It had to be something special that— Got it!" He gave a happy snap of his fingers.

"What? What?"

"About six months ago he presented me with an autographed copy of his old cook book—the one he wrote when he had his national television show in the Fifties," explained Scrib. "Yeah, the *Chef Pastore TV Cooking Guide*. It was on *The New York Times* list for weeks back in—"

"Where is the darn thing?"

Scrib considered. "I never got around to taking it home," he remembered. "Nope. So the book must still be in my office at the agency."

Molly whipped off her apron, flicked off all three burners, and said, "Let's go get it."

Coming into his office out of the shadowy hallway, she observed, "Dinky."

Scrib nodded toward the small window that looked out on a drab stretch of brick wall. "Not much of a view, either," he said, clicking on his desk lamp.

"No wonder you've been resentful of me," she said. "Only four short months with A&A and I have a spacious office that makes this one look—"

"Account people always fare better than copywriters." He crouched down in front of the forlorn little grey bookcase next to his ancient desk.

The shelves were packed with reference books, broken-spined paperbacks, piles of old commercial scripts, bundles of advertising newsletters, a Betty Boop penny bank, a folded-up coat sweater, and a jar of peanut butter.

"Yep, here it is." When Scrib tugged the fat book free, the jar of peanut butter hopped to the floor.

Placing the book on his stained green blotter, he dropped into his swivel chair. It gave a keening moan. "Let's see now. Molasses—molasses—"

Molly rubbed at the edge of his desk with her fingertips and then perched on it to watch him as he ran a finger along the index column. "You really ought to be doing better than this," she said. "You're not a bad copywriter and—"

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"I've had a few setbacks. Page 117, page 226, page 394—"

"Were you sick or—"

"Nope, I got sidetracked. Into trying to be a comedian."

"I didn't know that."

"Few people do."

"What went wrong?"

"Numerous things." He turned to page 117. "This calls for two cups molasses."

"Ugh," Molly remarked.

He leaped ahead to page 226. "What I'd like to do now, as soon as I accumulate enough money, is start my own advertising agency. Merlin, Limited, specializing in humorous copy."

"That'll take considerable money."

"Exactly . . . Nope, this one's for molasses cookies and calls for half a cup."

"If and when you start your own shop," Molly said, "I might come along."

He paused to look up at her. "Can I afford you?"

"Depends on how much money Chef Pastore helps us make."

"Hey! Here it is," he announced, returning his attention to the late chef's cook book. "The first ingredient is six tablespoons molasses."

Molly put her hand on his arm. "Is there a clue in there anywhere?"

"Well, it's a recipe for Boston Brown Bread," said Scrib, a shade disappointed.

"Meaning maybe he was killed by a man named Brown?"

"Or a lady from Boston."

"Or someone who owns a bakery."

"Damn, it doesn't look like much of a lead to anything." He turned again to the index and then began flipping pages at random. "That seems to be the only damn recipe in this entire bubbleheaded book that uses six tablespoons of molasses."

"I never much liked molasses," she said. "It has such a dark brown taste."

Shutting the book, Scrib leaned back. The chair groaned. "Okay, the chef wanted me to read this recipe—and then what?"

"Bake some bread?"

Scrib tapped his thumb and forefinger on his desk. "Where did he figure I'd go next?"

"He was breathing his last, remember? Maybe none of what he said means a darn thing and we're simply wasting—"

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"No, Boston Brown Bread has to mean something," insisted Scrib. "He's dying, he's got a secret worth money and on top of that he doesn't want whoever it was who killed him to get away free and clear."

"I hate to sound pessimistic, but—"

"The Hotel Waterloo." Scrib sat up.

"That's not in Boston, it's right down on—"

"He had a room there, they threw it in as part of the deal. He was head chef and got a free room." He stood up. "The next part of the answer's got to be in his room."

It wasn't, though.

At least not any more—if it ever had been.

"Someone anticipated us," said Scrib, who was standing by the tumbled bed.

"I don't think it was Sergeant Hunsburger," said Molly, surveying the disordered room. "He struck me as being much more fastidious than—"

"No, this was the killer," Scrib told her.

All the drawers in the woebegone bureau against the blotchy green wall had been yanked out, shaken, and dropped. The threadbare rug had been rolled up, the two suitcases taken out of the narrow closet and searched. There were clothes, papers, two fresh chef's hats, and a silver cake-server scattered on the floor.

Molly reached into her heavy canvas shoulder bag. "Mind if I smoke? I've cut down to about one cigarette a day and this feels like a good time to indulge."

"You ought to quit." Scrib dropped to his hands and knees. "Damn, there's no way of knowing if the killer found what he was looking for or not."

Molly held a package of cigarettes in her left hand. "One a day isn't a very big habit."

"None is better."

"Oh, the hell with you. I need a cigarette." She shook one out, lit it, and took a deep drag. "I'm not as used to finding bodies as you are."

Scrib began pacing off a slow circuit of the dead man's room. "I guess I better go through all this scattered stuff and see if there's anything pertaining to brown or Boston."

"Whatever the killer was looking for is pretty small and flat,

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right?" She exhaled smoke and ribbons of it began snaking up toward the peach-colored light fixture dangling high above the bed.

"Yep, something you could slip under a rug. Pictures, letters, money."

"Interesting how many valuable things are small and flat." She exhaled more smoke.

Within fifteen minutes Scrib and the red-haired young woman had sifted through all of Chef Pastore's belongings. There was nothing that told them anything.

Scrib gave the room key back to the desk clerk in the lobby. "Thanks, Hermie."

"Anything to oblige, Mr. Merlin," said the dark young man. "Have you been considering my suggestion?"

"Which one?"

"To use me as an actor in the next Waterloo TV commercial you guys do," the clerk reminded him. "Seems odd to me to bring in actors to play the clerks and bellhops when you got—"

"I mentioned you to Mr. Amthrax, but—"

"Did you tell him how much I look like Treat Williams? That's a plus."

"Forgot to. Next chance I get." He rested an elbow on the sign-in desk, looking over at Molly, who was sitting demurely in a fat armchair near the switchboard girl's cubicle. She really was an attractive girl. "Hermie, did Chef Pastore ever talk much with you?"

"Lou? Naw, he thought he was still cooking at the Waldorf or someplace."

"Was that his first name—Lou?"

"Sure, didn't you know? No, he probably insisted you all call him Chef."

"I'm curious about who he might have known around the hotel here. For instance, is there anyone named Brown who—"

"Lou wasn't friends with anybody. Except Marina."

"Who? One of the maids or—"

"She works the switchboard on the eight-to-midnight shift," answered Hermie, nodding at the alcove. "She was pretty thick with Lou and I didn't expect she'd even come in tonight, him just dead and all. She's here, though, but tearful."

Scrib crossed over to the switchboard. "My name's Scrib Merlin," he said to the plump blonde woman sitting there. "I was a friend and associate of Lou Pastore and—"

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"The poor man, the poor dear man," said Marina, rubbing at her nose. "He was a genius, a marvelous person, and—now—"

Along the wall on the sobbing woman's left was a low book case. There were two dozen phone directories lined up on the top shelf. As Scrib casually glanced at them the word *Boston* suddenly leaped out at him. "Hey! That must be it," he said. "I have to phone someone in Boston, a friend of Lou's up there. May I borrow that phone directory for a moment?"

"Certainly." She reached out, unlooking, took it off the shelf, and passed it to him.

Molly made an angry noise and turned away from the six photos spread out across her living-room coffee table. "So it's true," she murmured.

"Hum? What's true?"

She coughed into her hand. "I mean, it's true the chef was blackmailing somebody."

"I warned you about looking at this kind of picture," Scrib said, frowning at the girl. "Pictures of people in this sort of situation can upset you."

"I'm not at all upset," she assured him. "Seeing people in bed making love doesn't sicken me or anything."

"You know who the guy in all the photos is, don't you?"

She said, "He looks sort of familiar."

"Sometimes people look different without their clothes," said Scrib, shifting each of the photos a half inch to the right.

Each of the pictures showed the same blond forty-year-old man in what used to be called compromising positions with two different young women. The pictures had been shot through a transom and the bedroom in question was obviously one at the Waterloo Hotel. Chef Pastore had enclosed copies of his six shots, plus the negatives, in a white hotel envelope and then taped them to the inside back cover of the Boston phone directory. He had been intending to retrieve them himself.

"This is great," said Scrib. "Before us we see none other than Rodlow Neeb."

"Is that who he is? I know I've seen him around the agency a few times."

"So had the chef probably, which is how he came to recognize Neeb when he went sneaking into the Waterloo for his assignations," said Scrib, leaning back. "Yep, Rodlow Neeb. He's the ad manager over

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at one of our biggest clients, Jarvis Drugs, makers of Snooz, No Sneez, and Snoz." He slid each photo a half inch to the left. "Neeb earns around $150,000 a year *and* he's married to Dinah Corkin."

"Who's she?"

"The Corkin Paper heiress." Scrib grinned. "He'll want to buy these pictures—he'll have to. If his wife saw them, he'd be in considerable trouble. Corkin also owns a share of Jarvis. Yep, Neeb is going to pay money. Big money."

"Scrib—"

He glanced over at her. "What?"

Impulsively she kissed him on the cheek. "Just be careful, will you? You don't want to end up like Chef Pastore."

It was a little after 11 A.M. on a near perfect Saturday morning. Scrib was whistling sedately as he pushed through the heavy glass doors of the Museum of Advanced Art. He'd phoned Rodlow Neeb last night from Molly's penthouse and made his pitch. Everything had gone well. Neeb had been scared silly and agreed right off to paying $100,000 in cash for the photos and negatives that the chef had more or less willed to Scrib.

And Scrib had picked a near perfect place to make the exchange, the Food Is Art/Art Is Food exhibit in the main gallery at the AA. A huge well-lighted room on the ground floor was where the exhibit was being staged. No chance of Neeb's ambushing him or dragging him into a dark corner to do him bodily harm. Nope, Scrib would hand him the pictures, take the briefcase full of cash in return, and that would be it. He'd have $100,000, which would give him a hell of a good start toward setting up his own business. Well, even though he had to turn over forty percent to Molly, he'd still have $60,000. That wasn't bad, even these days.

A smile touched his face as, walking across the bright airy foyer of the museum, he thought of Molly. She was an attractive young woman—bright, too. Up until now, none of the women he'd been involved with had been able to understand his somewhat mercenary outlook. But Molly did. She even shared it. She'd be waiting for him back at her apartment. So, when he'd divided up the money he might just mention to her that—

"Holy Hannah!"

Molly wasn't home at her penthouse apartment. She was right here in the bright and airy main exhibition room of the Museum of

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Advanced Art. He'd just seen her ducking behind a twenty-foot-high plaster BLT sandwich.

"What kind of bubbleheaded behavior is this?"

Keeping his face unclouded, he wended his way through the scatter of other patrons.

"Don't touch the iron pickle, Kevin."

"Marvelous, marvelous. A giant rubber blintz sums it all up, doesn't it?"

By stationing himself behind an immense slice of swiss cheese, executed in some kind of rubbery plastic and hanging like a curtain in the middle of the room, Scrib found he could, peeking through one of the holes, watch Molly unseen. He was also near enough to the gigantic sandwich to hear what she was saying to the big blond man in the conservative grey suit. It was Rodlow Neeb, with a fat briefcase tucked up under one arm.

"Relax, Molly," Neeb responded to the redhead. "I can explain the—"

"Explain my fanny!" Molly's face was pale and blurred with anger. "You swore to me I was the only woman you were seeing."

"You and my wife, yes. I can't drop her without a great deal of financially embarrassing things happen—"

"Here I compromise my principles, carry on a torrid affair with a married man, I let you pay the outlandish rent on that seamy love nest on Central Park—"

"It's not exactly a love nest, Moll." Neeb made hushing motions with his free hand. "Even if it were, dear, shouting the details in public isn't—"

"Don't talk to me about going public, you oaf!" Her voice kept getting angrier and louder. "You, who've been carrying on with not one but two other bimboes at that tacky Waterloo Hotel. How could you?"

Neeb glanced anxiously around. A thin old man who had been admiring a huge inflated tomato was now eyeing him. "Quit now, Moll. Let's go someplace quiet for brunch as soon as—"

"We're not going anywhere, Rodlow," she told him. "Oh, I'm so glad I followed you yesterday instead of going into the agency. Yes, I followed you down to Mitgang's. I thought you might be off on another of your furtive assignations, as I'd long suspected, but instead you were slaying poor Chef Pastore."

"Quiet, quiet. You don't want to make that sort of allegation too loudly, Moll."

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"I'm also glad I attached myself to the poor simp who took over from the chef. That way I found out the whole truth."

Poor simp? said Scrib to himself.

"Yes, that way I got to see the photos, Rodlow. You never do take a good picture, do you? It's that flabby double chin of yours and—"

"Control your temper, Molly. We can—"

"No, my controlling days are over," she said. "I came here this morning for just one thing. Well, two actually. I wanted to see your simpy face while you still thought you were going to get those photos and be home free."

"Just a little family squabble, folks," Neeb said to the half dozen food-art patrons who were staring at them.

"Remember what I told you I'd do to you if you were unfaithful to me, Rodlow?"

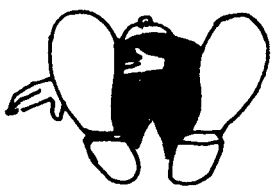
"Oh, sure, you said you were going to kill me. But I assumed—Moll!"

She yanked a .32 revolver out of her canvas shoulder bag. "I'm a person of my word," she told him and shot him three times in the stomach.

Neeb's placating smile remained on his face for several seconds. Then all expression dropped away, his mouth fell open, and he collapsed to the bright floor. The briefcase, splashed with blood, was pinned beneath him.

Scrib took a deep breath. He thrust his hands deep into his pockets. As more people came running to the scene of the shooting, he walked out of the museum and into the street.

The sun came shining down on him. It was a near perfect morning.



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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

CLARK HOWARD

Daw drummed his fingers silently on the bar and looked from one face to the next. They all looked the same to him, always had: a day's growth of beard, stale beer on their breaths, plaid shirts with the sleeves rolled up, nicotine-stained fingers holding burning cigarettes, and an occasional uninhibited belch. No wonder the deer run, he thought . . .

A story with echoes of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and of the movie High Noon *but with a subsistence all its own, set in the dark future but with a chilling feel of the present . . .*

RUN FROM THE HUNTER

by CLARK HOWARD

Daw had known all along that the orders from Washington would start coming someday. So it was no surprise to him when the first one arrived. No *real* surprise, anyway. He *had* been caught somewhat off-guard. Nearly a year had passed since his indoctrination and a lot of people, himself included, had begun to relax. Some had even told themselves that the new law would never go into effect. Daw had not been that naive. He relaxed like the others—but he always knew it would start someday.

And start it had. An hour earlier, Len Tripp, the town's old postmaster, had trudged through the snow from the post office to the courthouse to personally deliver the large, official-looking blue envelope. "You got to sign for it, Sheriff," Len said. "In triplicate."

"That figures," said Daw. He unclipped a ballpoint from the pocket of his khaki shirt and wrote his name in the three places Len Tripp indicated.

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"No postmark on it," Len said. "First piece of mail in forty-two years of postal service I've seen without a postmark." He squinted at Daw. "Is it from that new agency? The one people have been talking about?"

Daw turned the envelope over and looked at its official seal. The letters DPC-USA stood out clearly. "That's where it's from, all right." He couldn't keep his shoulders from slumping a little as he said it. As if the blue envelope were a great weight.

"I reckon you want me to keep quiet about it coming," Len said.

Daw shook his head. "Not particularly. People are going to find out about it sooner or later."

"But if everybody finds out about it at once, there could be a mess of trouble. I mean—"

"I always expect a certain amount of trouble enforcing the law, Len," said Daw. "Most times I run into less than I'm looking for."

"It might be different this time," the old postmaster said darkly. "Lots of people might not stand for this."

"The law is the law, Len," Daw said evenly.

"It's not a law I voted for, by God!"

"Me either. But enough people *did* vote for it to make it pass. And it *will* be enforced. By me, if possible—or by a busload of federal marshals from Bismarck—or even by the National Guard or Army, if necessary. But it *will* be enforced, Len."

The old postmaster's face went slack and he suddenly looked very tired. "Daw, what in the hell is this world coming to?" he asked wearily.

Daw couldn't answer that one. He just shook his head.

When Len Tripp left, Daw stood at the window and watched him trudge back across the snow-covered town square. Before Len reached the post office, Daw's phone began to ring. He looked up at his wall clock. It was nearly nine. That would be Sheila calling. She would have just gotten home from the midnight-to-eight shift at the hospital and would be out of her starched uniform dress, probably standing in her white pantyhose—

"Sheriff's office," he answered. "Daw speaking."

"Damn, it's cold out," Sheila said without preliminary. "What's the temp?"

"It was zero when I got here this morning," he said. "Probably five or six by now."

"Swell. A heat wave. Sometimes I wonder why I ever left Arizona."

Sometimes I do too, Daw thought. Life had certainly been a lot

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less complicated for him a year ago, before Sheila had abandoned a bad marriage in Tucson and taken a job as night head-nurse at the county hospital.

"Are you coming over for coffee or something?" she asked.

"No, I can't," Daw said. "Something came up that I have to attend to."

There was a moment of silence on the line, as cold as the thin air outside. Then Sheila said, "Things that you have to take care of have been coming up a lot lately, haven't they?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when we first started seeing each other, you couldn't wait to get over here when I got home from work. That was back when you thought my white pantyhose were the greatest thing you'd ever seen on a woman. Now it seems like you have to make an effort to come over. Almost like it's not worth the trouble any more."

"Something really did come up this morning," Daw said, looking down at the blue envelope. He immediately regretted saying it.

"You say that as if this is the first time your excuse has been legitimate," she accused. She waited for his reply. When it was not forthcoming, she began to fume. "Look, my friend, if you think you're just going to toss me aside like last year's calendar, you're wrong. You've made a few promises, you know."

"There was nothing definite between us, Sheila—"

"Maybe not from your point of view," she snapped, "but there sure as hell was from mine!"

"You knew I was married—"

"Right. And I know you still are. As a matter of fact, I talked to your wife just yesterday. But let's stick to the point. Haven't you told me at least three times that you were going to get a divorce?"

"I recall saying that once or twice," he admitted. "What do you mean, you talked to my wife yesterday?"

"Do I detect a note of interest in your voice now?" Sheila baited.

"Where did you run into Nancy?" he asked.

"She brought your little girl out to the hospital for a polio shot."

Of course. Nancy had mentioned it at supper last night. But she hadn't mentioned talking to Sheila. "What did you two talk about?" he asked.

"What we talked about isn't important," Sheila said. "What we *could* have talked about is. We could have talked about you. You know, lover, I could really shock that little wife of yours if I told her some things."

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"What would that get you?" he asked.

"A divorce for you. Then we could start from there. I want us to have a talk about this, Daw. I'm serious."

I guess you are, Daw thought. People have to be serious to make threats. "All right, we'll talk. But it'll have to be this afternoon. What time will you get up?"

"I don't know if I'll even sleep. I've got a splitting headache."

"I won't stop over until after three. In case you do sleep."

"Fine. We've got to settle this, Daw."

"We'll settle it," he promised.

He put on his hat and shearling coat, put the blue envelope in his pocket, and left the courthouse. Bending his head to the needlelike wind, he walked around a snowdrift at the curb and made his way across the street to Layton's Drugstore. Phil Layton, who was the mayor, was behind the cosmetics counter, arranging a shelf. Daw put the envelope on the counter. "It finally came," he said simply.

Layton stopped and looked at him, one hand holding a feather duster. His color faded as he looked down at the envelope. "Are you sure?" he asked. "Have you opened it?"

"It has to be opened in your presence," Daw reminded him. "You're the highest elected public official."

Layton swallowed with difficulty. "Are you sure that's what it is?"

"Look at the seal. Can you think of any other agency with the initials DPC?"

"I guess not," Layton said nervously. "What do we do now?"

"We open it," Daw said. He reached for the envelope.

"Let's do it in the back," Layton said quickly. "In case someone comes in."

"All right. I don't see that it makes much difference, though. Everybody knows you're the one who has to make the authorization. The procedures were made public a year ago when the law was passed."

"Some people may have forgotten," Layton said. "I'll feel better doing it in the back."

Daw shrugged. "Whatever."

They went back behind the drug counter and Daw broke the seal on the envelope and removed a single sheet of paper. He offered it to Layton. The mayor almost recoiled from it. "No, no, you read it, Sheriff. Please."

Daw unfolded the page and quickly scanned its typed contents.

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Layton watched him closely. Daw's expression did not change. Layton waited until Daw seemed to be at the bottom of the page, then abruptly asked, "How many?"

"Six," Daw replied quietly.

The tense line of Layton's mouth softened a bit. "Six. Well. That, uh, that's not as bad as I expected." He wet his lips. "Are they, uh, designated or optional?"

"Optional."

Instant relief flushed over Layton's face. Sure, you gutless bastard, Daw thought. That takes you off the hook, doesn't it? Now you can leave it all up to me.

"I'm going to leave it all up to you, Sheriff," Layton said. "I'm allowed to do that when the selection is optional and there are less than a dozen, you know."

"I know."

Layton cleared his throat. "All right. You handle it then."

"How?"

"Any way you like," Layton said. "Just remember that this isn't the big city like Bismarck or Helena. We're a small town with a small budget. No money has been allocated for this, you know. It'll have to come out of the general fund. So use discretion."

Daw nodded. "Discretion. Right."

Walking up the street, away from Layton's Drugstore, Daw heard someone calling him from behind. "Sheriff! Sheriff—!"

He turned and saw old Mr. Deming, the publisher of their weekly newspaper, hurrying precariously after him on the icy sidewalk. Daw stepped into the doorway of the Kroger market, out of the drilling wind, and waited for him. "'Morning, Mr. Deming," he said when the old man reached him.

"I've just been talking to Len Tripp," Deming said without returning Daw's greeting. "He tells me the first DPC order has come down."

"Yessir, it has."

"I want to interview you about it. We have to make sure everyone understands what's happening."

"There's not a person over six in the whole country who doesn't know what's happening, Mr. Deming," Daw said easily. "And even if there were, an interview with me wouldn't do any good. By the time you got your paper out, it would all be over with."

Old Mr. Deming's eyes widened. "That fast?"

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"That fast," Daw confirmed. "Putting it off will just make it hard for the whole town. Better to get it over with."

"How, uh, how many are we talking about, Daw?"

"Six."

"Selected how?"

"My option. By order of the mayor."

Deming nodded thoughtfully. "That makes it pretty hard on you, doesn't it?"

"Nobody promised the job would be easy."

"You seem to be taking it pretty much in stride," Deming observed. There was something about his tone that rankled Daw. He felt the cold hairs bristle on the back of his neck.

"What do you expect me to do, Mr. Deming? It's my job, my duty. If I let myself get all emotional, it's just going to make it that much harder to do. Seems to me I've *got* to take it in stride."

"You're right, you're absolutely right," Deming quickly placated. "After all, *somebody* has to brace up and take the responsibility. I couldn't do it, no sir. My nerves wouldn't take it. 'Course, I'm quite a lot older than you." Deming's eyes narrowed and he peered curiously at Daw, almost as if he were seeing him for the first time. "Tell me something, Daw," he said in a quieter voice. "How does it feel?"

Daw fixed the older man in a stare as icy as the winter street on which they stood. "How does what feel?" he asked flatly.

"You know," said Deming.

"No, I don't know. How does what feel?" He would be damned if he would answer unless Deming asked it outright.

Daw waited a long, cold minute, his eyes locked to Deming's, his silence challenging the editor to say it, to put it into words, to bring it out into the open. But Deming was too weak to do it.

"Excuse me, Mr. Deming," Daw said at last. "I have to be on my way."

He stepped back out into the wind and continued down the street.

At the county road office, which was little more than a shack in one corner of the equipment yard, Daw pulled off his gloves and warmed his hands over a kerosene stove.

"Hey there, Daw," said Billy Thors, the district road supervisor. "What brings you out in the heat of the day? My men been parking their rigs in town again?"

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"No, nothing like that. I need to borrow a small bulldozer this afternoon. You got one idle?"

Billy wiped the condensation off a window pane and peered out at the yard. "Let's see. Yeah, I got one with a ten-foot blade. That be big enough for you?"

"Ten-foot blade's fine."

"You ain't going to be able to move no earth, you know," Billy warned. "Ground's too froze."

"I know. I just want to push some snow and tree limbs into that sluice trench out off Dwight Road. Know where I mean?"

"Sure. Want me to have one of my men there to do it for you?"

"No. Thanks anyway, Billy. Just park the dozer there about two this afternoon. You can have it picked up when your crew comes in tonight."

"I'll do her, Daw."

"I owe you one, Billy," said Daw, pulling his gloves back on.

Daw walked back up to the town square. By the clock on the courthouse, it was eleven o'clock straight up. To hell with the office, Daw thought. He was going home for a while. He walked on around the courthouse to where his car was parked. Getting in, he started the engine and flipped on the defroster. Leaning his head against the seat back, waiting for the engine to warm up enough to melt the ice on the windshield, he closed his eyes and thought about Sheila.

God, he was a fool. He'd been married for a dozen years, and he and Nancy had known each other nearly three times that long. They had grown up together, gone to school together, even lost their virginity together. Daw smiled slyly, remembering the back seat of his old Plymouth. They had been scared to death and he had kept telling her everything would turn out all right. It had, too. They eventually married and two years later had little Jennie. The three of them had a good life together—until Sheila came along.

Daw met Sheila one night when he took a man in for a beer-bottle cut sustained in a poolroom fight. There had been instant electricity between them, a magnetism both of them recognized and neither could ignore. Daw was overwhelmed by the feeling. The woman's being had struck him like a lightning bolt. Whatever the consequence, he immediately determined that she was not to be denied him.

And she had not.

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Fool, he berated himself again. Dumb hick. Country bumpkin. Now you're in it, let's see you get out.

Daw sighed and flipped on the wipers to push away the half-melted ice. With the windshield clean, he shifted to reverse and listened to the crunch of the snow chains as he backed the car out. He drove home.

Jennie's fleece-lined school boots were in the front hall when Daw got home, and the first thing he thought was that she was sick. He hurried to the kitchen where Nancy was stirring thick, dark pea soup. "What's the matter with Jen?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, nothing, hon," said Nancy. "They had to shut down the school. Ran out of oil for the furnace again."

"Oh." Daw was relieved. As he started to unbutton his coat, Jennie came bounding into the room.

"Leave your coat on, Dad!" she said excitedly. "The deer are back! I just saw them from the upstairs window!" She hurried to get her boots from the front hall.

Nancy looked over from the stove and smiled warmly at her husband. "Like father, like daughter," she said. Even teasing, there was a hint of pride in her voice.

Daw went out the back door as Jennie came running around from the front. "Where did you see them?" he asked.

"Back by the leaning oak. Where we fed them the first time."

"Okay, get the feed," Daw said. "And remember what I taught you about moving: everything easy, nothing sudden."

"I remember."

He watched as she moved to the shed and returned with a burlap bag containing several pounds of game feed. Then she took her father's hand and they walked slowly into the forest behind the house, toward a big leaning oak tree perhaps twenty yards into the stand. The snow under their feet made crunching sounds like Daw's snow chains and the wind above their heads blew puffs of fresh snow down on them. Daw could feel his daughter's hand trembling in his, and knew it wasn't from the cold. Nothing excited Jennie like the deer.

When they were as close as they dared go, they stopped and looked across a small clearing next to the leaning oak. There, scavenging for any rare strips of green bark that might be left on the ice-caked trees, was a doe and two yearlings. They stopped at once at the scent

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of the humans, and stood, at their safe distance, looking at Daw and Jenny.

"Is it her, Dad? Is it the same one we fed last year?" Jennie asked excitedly.

Daw scrutinized the doe with his trained policeman's eye. He saw a deep scar of proud flesh far back on one side of her neck, probably made, Daw had decided the previous winter, from barbed wire, and probably while the doe was running to escape hunters. Deer had such poor eyesight they often got torn up by the thin number-six wire.

"Yes, it's her," Daw said. "Do the same thing you did last year and she'll probably remember you."

"What about the yearlings?"

"They don't know you, but they'll do what their mother does."

"Why does she have two yearlings, Dad?"

"One is her own and she probably adopted the other when hunters got its mother. Go ahead and start putting the feed out now or they'll get nervous and bolt."

Moving very cautiously, almost in exaggerated slow motion, Jennie knelt in the snow and put the feed bag in front of her. A fine film of dust, caught in the loose weave of the burlap, puffed out and greyed the perfect white that covered the ground. Jennie folded back the neck of the bag and scooped out a handful of feed. It was solid feed, in pellets, and was used mainly for the feeding of deer and elk on federal game preserves or Indian reservations. Daw had got half a bag of it the last time he visited the Shoshone nation.

"Easy now," he quietly cautioned his daughter. He watched as she spread some of the pellets on top of the bag, then spread a few more just in front of it, then a few farther out, and others farther still, until at last she had to carefully toss several at a time to the outer perimeter where they were spread.

"All right, that's enough," Daw said.

Jennie closed the neck of the bag and remained kneeling behind it. Daw stayed where he was, standing a few paces back.

They waited. The white world around them was silent and still. Daw saw Jennie's shoulders convulse with an involuntary shudder. He glanced at her knees and saw that the snow was soaking up into her ski pants. Not that it will bother her, he thought. She probably didn't even know she was cold. Not with the deer there.

Presently the doe took a single step forward. Then another. And a third.

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"Very still," Daw whispered a reminder to his daughter.

The doe walked to the pellet of food nearest her and smelled it. Then ate it, quickly and without hesitation. She ate a second one, and a third. She moved forward again, stopped, and looked back at the two yearlings. Silently she communicated with them. The two yearlings walked up next to her, one on each side. They also began to eat. And as they all ate, they moved steadily toward Jennie. In five minutes, Daw thought, she would be petting both yearlings.

He waited until his daughter looked up at him, then winked at her and started back for the house.

Reverend Adam Deiner, pastor of the German Lutheran Church Daw and his family attended, was waiting when he got back in the house. "I'd like to talk to you, Daw, if you have a few minutes," the minister said. He was Daw's age but looked younger, with a full head of hair and a large wave in front. Daw's own hair was trimmed very short, and receding.

Daw looked at Nancy, who had just poured Reverend Deiner a cup of tea. "Excuse us, will you, honey?"

"You might want her to stay," the minister said. "What I want to talk about concerns—"

"I know what you want to talk about, Adam," said Daw. "And I prefer that we talk alone."

Nancy started to pour Daw a cup of coffee but he shook his head, so she quickly took the tray and left the room.

"Then you know why I'm here," Deiner said.

Daw nodded. "You've heard that the first orders arrived."

"Exactly. And I'm here to offer you the church's support when you oppose those orders."

Daw stared flatly at Adam Deiner. He and Adam had been friends for twenty years. At one time they had even competed for Nancy's affections. Daw won, and Adam had never married.

It was only lately, since the population troubles had begun, that Daw realized how little the minister knew about life as it really was, about people as they really were, about anything. Men of God, Daw had decided, spent too much time in the spiritual world and not enough in the real world.

"Adam," Daw said quietly, "I'm not going to oppose the orders. My job is to uphold the law, not oppose it."

The minister's eyes widened and an expression of incredulity spread over his face. "I can't believe you said that."

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"I'm sorry," Daw told him. "It's my duty—"

"You have a greater duty to God!" the minister said sharply.

Daw shook his head. "It's not that simple, Adam."

"But it is! It is! Simply make a stand. Choose the path of righteousness—"

"The only thing righteous left in the world *is* the law," Daw snapped. "It's the only thing that's keeping all of us from turning into animals. Look around you, Adam. Open your eyes and face reality. There are too *many* of us! Don't you understand that? *Too many.* There's not enough food, not enough fuel, not enough *anything.* We've been indulging in waste for decades and decades—and now there's nothing left to waste, because there's not even enough to go around. Don't you see, we've *got* to have controls. If we don't, there'll be wholesale violence. People will start killing each other just to get their share."

"Isn't that what *you're* going to do?" Deiner asked. "Under the guise of the law?"

Daw sighed quietly. "You just won't understand, will you?"

Reverend Deiner rose and looked down on Daw. His face was sad, even a little hurt. His shoulders had slumped and there was a helplessness about him. "You'll never forgive yourself if you do this evil thing," he warned quietly.

Daw shook his head. "I'd never forgive myself if I followed your advice. If I defied the law of the land, if I let people in this community riot and turn into savages, if I stood by and watched the children go first, then the women, then the men among us who are the weakest; if I stood by and let the town be taken over by the thugs and hoodlums of the land simply because they were the strongest, simply because they had the weapons and weren't afraid to use them and because there was no one around to uphold law and order—then, Reverend, I'd never forgive myself. If I stood alongside you and self-righteously watched the chaos roll over the helpless and the weak who no longer had anyone to protect them, I'd never forgive myself for that."

Daw rose and faced the minister directly. "You're wrong, Adam," he concluded quietly. "You're no more equipped to deal with today's world than the deer my daughter is feeding out back right now. At least the deer have the good sense to run from the hunter. All you seem to want to do is stand and die in the name of martyrdom."

Deiner picked up his coat and walked to the door. His jaw was

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now clenched tightly but his eyes remained sad. "You'll burn in hell if you do it, Daw," he said without rancor.

"My soul and my body maybe," said Daw. "But not my conscience."

Adam Deiner left and Daw closed the door after him. Nancy came into the room and stood next to her husband. "Did you hear it?" Daw asked.

"Yes."

"And?"

Nancy took his arm and pressed her cheek to his muscle. "I'm glad I picked you to go through life with," she said.

Daw put both arms around her. "Have I ever told you how glad I am that you did pick me?"

Nancy smiled a sad smile. "Not for a long time now."

"I guess I haven't done a lot of things for a long time now. But I'm going to make up for it. Things are going to be the way they used to be."

Nancy looked up from his shoulder. "Don't try too hard for that, dear one," she said. "It'll hurt too much when you don't make it."

Daw looked into her eyes, weighing her words against everything he knew and that she did *not* know at the moment. He was not surprised by what she'd said—he had known for a long time that she was the smartest between them. She was right. Nothing could ever be as it had been before. Not in this life anyway. But at least it could be better.

He touched her cheek. "It will be good again," he said. "Somehow. I promise."

He drove back uptown and parked on a side street in front of the Antler Club. He went inside and stood at the near end of the bar next to a man named Red Tully, who had a stripped-down Webley .30-06 spread out in front of him on a chamois cloth. Tully was wiping the various parts with an oily rag while he and two other men farther down the bar watched a television set suspended from the wall. Another pair of men were alternating between shooting pool and watching the same television. The networks were only on two hours a day now, and most of the news was bad. Daw leaned on the bar with his elbows and studied the picture on the screen: a line of policemen in helmets swinging clubs at a mob and dragging individuals off to be locked in a jail van. There was a lot of crowd noise, some screams and curses, and sirens in the background.

"Where's that at?" Daw asked.

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"Seattle," said Red Tully. "But that ain't nothing. You should have seen it a while ago when they had Chicago on. And Atlanta and D.C. Them places *really* had riots."

One of the men down the bar turned to Daw. "You think we gonna have that kind of trouble, Sheriff?" he asked.

Daw shook his head. "Not if I get me the right kind of deputies," he said pointedly.

The two men at the pool table put down their cuesticks and stepped up to the bar. The men already at the bar turned away from the television and stared thoughtfully at Daw. Red Tully looked at the men, smiled, then put aside his oily rag and began to reassemble his Webley.

"You sure are something, Daw," he said. "I swear you are. Only time you ever bother with us old boys is when you stop us out on the road to check hunting licenses. Only time you ever come around the club is to give one of us a parking ticket. We're all hunters that belong to this club, and you ain't never made no secret of the fact that you don't cotton to hunters. You don't do no hunting yourself so you don't think nobody else ought to. But now, when you think you might have trouble, when you think you might need some backup, you come over here looking to hire deputies. You sure got your nerve, Daw, swear to God you have."

Daw drummed his fingers silently on the bar and looked from one face to the next. They all looked the same to him, always had: a day's growth of beard, stale beer on their breaths, plaid shirts with the sleeves rolled up, nicotine-stained fingers holding burning cigarettes, and an occasional uninhibited belch. No wonder the deer run, he thought.

"You got me wrong, Red," Daw said. "I'm not looking for deputies because I expect any trouble. There won't be any trouble—leastwise, none that I can't take care of. What I'm looking for is men who know how to handle a rifle. Men who can shoot." He paused for effect, then added, "Men who can kill."

Tully narrowed his eyes and squinted at Daw. "You mean to—"

Daw said nothing.

Tully wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "You want deputies to—to do what I think you want 'em to do?"

"Mayor Layton says we don't have any funds allotted for this sort of thing," Daw explained. "He says it has to come out of the general tax fund. The only money my office has in that fund is for the hiring of extra deputies. So that's what I'm doing."

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Tully pursed his lips and exchanged a sweeping glance with the other men. He forced a grin. "We, uh—we've hunted and killed just about ever'thing the law allows: elk, moose, deer, quail, wild turkey—"

"And a few things that the law *don't* allow," Daw interjected. "Like eagles and bighorn sheep."

"You can't prove that!" one of the men said.

"I'm not trying to," Daw told him. Then, to Tully: "What's your point?"

"My point is that I never figured the law would allow nothing like this. I can't hardly believe it."

"Believe it," Daw said simply.

Tully wiped his lips again. "How many we talking about?"

"Six. One apiece."

"Who does the picking?"

"Each man. It can't be done any other way."

Tully looked at Daw with a hint of admiration in his eyes. "You figured this thing pretty good, Daw. I didn't think you had it in you. Why, you thinking almost like a hunter thinks."

"A man has to change with the times," Daw said simply. "You and your friends want the jobs or not?"

Tully turned to the four men lined up next to him at the bar. He looked at each in turn, his eyes flicking from one to the next, resting on each man until he was given a shrug or a nod or consent by silence. Finally he looked at Daw again. "You got yourself some deputies, Sheriff."

"Fine." Daw glanced at his watch. "Bring your rifles and meet me at the sluice trench out by Dwight Road in an hour. We'll go over everything step by step. Then we'll go out and get it done. I want this thing over with quick."

"You're the boss," said Red Tully. He put out his hand. Daw shook hands with him.

When he got outside, Daw wiped his palm on his sleeve.

Sheila lived in a mobile-home park near the hospital. Most of the other tenants were comparative newcomers to town, who either also worked at the hospital or at the chemical food processing plant down the highway. None of them knew Daw, so there was never a problem with him being seen coming or going. Some of Sheila's neighbors probably thought he lived in the park, he had been around so much.

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As soon as Sheila opened the door for him, Daw knew she had not slept. Her brow was tightly pinched and her mouth pulled down at the corners like it got when she was tired. He decided to try to postpone their discussion. "You're beat, Sheila, and I've got something I have to take care of, so why don't we wait until later to talk?"

"No," she said emphatically. "I promised myself we were going to settle this thing *today*."

"Look, I have to be out on Dwight Road in a little while," he tried to explain. "I won't be long and then—"

"Good. Since you won't be long, I'll ride out and back with you. We can talk on the way. Then I'll be sure you won't forget to come back."

"You're being foolish, Sheila. It's getting colder out. Why don't you just wait here?"

"No. If you don't have time to talk now, I'm coming with you. That's final."

Daw's jaw tightened at her words but he forced himself to refrain from arguing any further. "Suit yourself," he said. "But you'd better bundle up—the sun will be going down soon."

She put on a hooded parka that he had bought her when they met for a weekend in Boise. He had told Nancy he was going to a law-enforcement seminar. That had been early in his affair with Sheila and the weekend had been splendid for both of them: cozy dinners, long walks holding hands, late breakfasts in the room, extra hours in bed—everything splendid. But that was before some of the shine had worn off Sheila.

"What's that?" Sheila asked when they got in the car. She pointed at the blue envelope Daw had stuck over the visor.

"That's what I was talking about this morning when I told you something had come up," he said. "Those are the first orders from the DPC."

"The DPC?"

"You know. The new government agency."

"Oh. Are they actually going through with that?"

"Sure. A majority of the people voted for it. It's the law now."

"Well, you and I have more important things to talk about," she said. She waited until Daw drove into the street. Then she began. "I thought we had an understanding that you were going to divorce Nancy and then you and I were going to get married. What ever happened to that?"

Daw kept his eyes on the road. "I'll admit we talked about it a

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couple of times, Sheila, but as far as an understanding is concerned—"

"Oh, yes, we had one," she insisted, interrupting. "We had a definite understanding. One I was counting on."

"I'm sorry, but I really don't see it that way. I thought about divorce at one time—"

"You thought about it a hell of a lot more than one time," she interrupted again. "Every time you saw me in my white pantyhose, every time we got it on together, all you could talk about was how nice it would be if it was just you and me—how we'd get a little apartment and a new car and learn to ski. Don't tell me you've forgotten all that, lover."

"I haven't forgotten anything," Daw replied quietly. "But things change, you know. People change. What you and I had just didn't last, Sheila."

"It lasted for me," she said tightly.

Daw kept looking straight ahead. He could feel her hard stare boring into the side of his head.

"I said, it lasted for me," she repeated.

"I heard you."

Daw stopped for a red light. As he sat there, a station wagon crossed in front of him. Red Tully was driving and his four hunter friends were passengers. One of them had his feet up on the seatback. Another was sucking on a beer can. Their rifles were clearly in sight. It reminded Daw that he had to pick up a rifle for his own use. "I have to swing by the office," he told Sheila.

He drove into town and parked behind the courthouse. "Afraid some of your friends will see us if we park in front?" Sheila asked sarcastically.

"This is where I always park," he said, keeping his tone neutral. No matter what he did or said now, he knew she would take exception to it.

He trudged into the office and unlocked the gun case. He pulled out a surplus National Guard carbine and loaded a magazine to it. The weapon made him think of Tully and the others. Low life, he thought. He had avoided association with men like Tully all his life. Now time and circumstance had seen to it that he must work with them. He sighed a deep, weary sigh and for a moment leaned against the wall next to the gun case. It seemed to him he was getting a lot more tired a lot quicker lately. But then, that was happening to a lot of people. The chemical food that had replaced sixty percent of

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everyone's diet was supposed to supply the body with all the essentials that it required to keep going, but people were finding out that over the long run it didn't work. Human beings needed natural foods, not chemicals. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough natural food to go around. It had to be rationed. So people subsisted on *ersatz* food and got tired a lot more.

Daw returned to the car and laid the carbine on the back seat. He drove away from the town square and headed for Dwight Road.

"Well?" Sheila asked after a couple of minutes.

"Well what?"

"You know damned well what!" she stormed. "Are you trying to make a fool out of me? Are you going to get a divorce and marry me or not?"

"Yes, I am."

Sheila's mouth dropped open. "What?"

"I said, yes, I am. If you're sure that's what you want."

"Of course that's what I want!" She studied his profile incredulously. She frowned. Her voice softened. "Do you mean it, honey?" she asked, putting a hand on his shoulder.

Daw glanced over and gave her a quick smile. "Why not? We can get away from here. Go somewhere new. Start over."

"Sure, honey!" She was delighted with the prospect. "I'd go anywhere with you. I can always find a job—anywhere there's a hospital. I'm a good nurse." She squeezed his arm. "I'll be a good wife too."

"Sure you will."

Daw turned into Dwight Road and guided the car off the side onto frozen gravel toward the sluice trench. He saw the bulldozer Billy Thors had parked there for him. And he saw Red Tully and the others standing around Tully's station wagon thirty yards away, near the frozen-over sluice dam. Daw pulled up next to the bulldozer and parked. He opened his door.

"Come on," he said.

"It's so cold, honey. I'll sit in the car."

"It's not that cold. Come on."

Sheila shrugged. "Okay, if you want me to."

Daw walked around behind the car. "I've got to find something in the trunk. Go on over and tell the boys I'll be right along."

Sheila hesitated, then shrugged again. "Okay." She waited until Daw opened the trunk, then started across the frozen ground toward the five men.

Daw bent into the trunk and waited, listening to the *crunch-*

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crunch of Sheila's footsteps in the thin air. When he judged her to be halfway across the clearing, he shut the trunk and opened a back door to get the carbine.

He killed Red Tully first, with the same kind of breast shot Tully always boasted that he used on deer. After Tully, he methodically killed the other four men. None of them had their rifles out of the station wagon, so they had no way to resist. One of them tried to get to the station wagon, but Daw picked him off in midstride.

He killed Sheila last, with a clean shot to the temple.

Then he got aboard the dozer, pushed the bodies and the station wagon into the sluice trench, and covered them up with snow. They would be washed away with the spring thaw.

Back at Phil Layton's drugstore, Daw took the printed form out of the blue envelope, filled in the date and time, and signed it. He handed it to Layton to countersign.

"Uh, don't we have to show names?" Layton asked.

Daw shook his head. "Names aren't required when it's random selection."

"That's right, I remember now." Layton signed the form and handed it back. "I, uh—I suppose I ought to know who they were."

"Why?" Daw asked. He put the form in a Department of Population Control blue return-envelope and sealed it.

"No reason," Phil Layton said. "I mean, I *am* the mayor, though. I *did* sign the form."

"I don't think that entitles you to know," Daw said. "You didn't want any part of this thing, Mr. Mayor. Now that it's over, it's too late to buy in."

Daw walked toward the front door. "Maybe you can guess. Try to figure out who you don't see around town any more."

As Daw walked out of the store, he heard Layton say, "Well, by God, *I'll* do the picking next time around!"

Daw walked down the cold, empty street toward the post office. The streets were dark. The town had turned off its street lights months ago. Hardly anyone went out at night any more. Most of the merchants in town, like Phil Layton, lived in their stores during the winter and only moved back home when the weather turned warm. Even Len Tripp, the old postmaster, lived in the post office eight months out of the year. Daw found him there now, sitting at the General Delivery window, making new candles by the light of an old candle. Daw handed him the blue envelope.

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"All over so soon?" the old man asked.

"All over," Daw confirmed.

Len Tripp shook his head sadly. "What's the world coming to, Daw?" he asked.

"Cheer up, old timer," Daw said. "It's not so bad."

Daw left the post office and walked toward the courthouse. Phil Layton's threat came back to him. By God, I'll do the picking next time around!

If Phil wasn't careful, Daw thought, he just might end up being one of the *picked*.

As he walked through the black, empty night, Daw began to whistle.

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ELLERY QUEEN

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Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
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20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $27.00 for 20 Words or Less
$1.35 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $1.35 each $.....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $.....
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(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 20 word ad $27.00 x 3 months = $81.00 x .85 = $68.85)

$ _____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

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(26) **$35.10**	(27) **$36.45**	(28) **$37.80**	(29) **$39.15**	(30) **$40.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**

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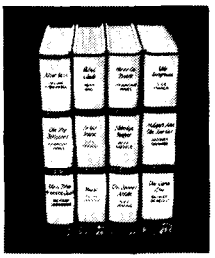

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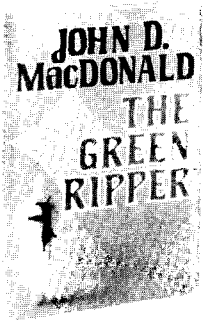

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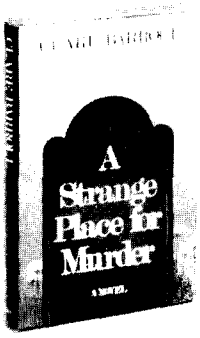

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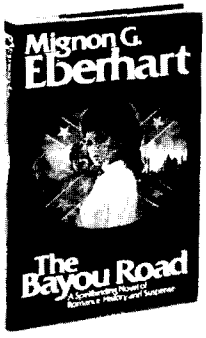

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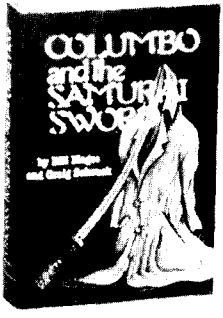

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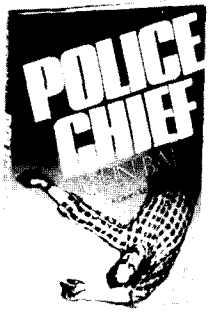

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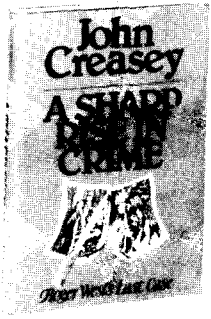

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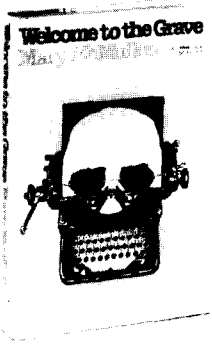

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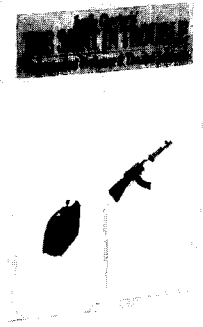

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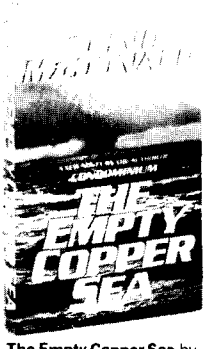

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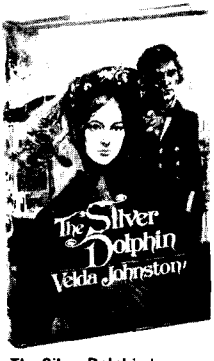

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